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# A HUNTER'S EXPERIENCES

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# A HUNTER'S EXPERIENCES

IN THE

# SOUTHERN STATES OF AMERICA

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE VARIOUS QUADRUPEDS AND BIRDS WHICH ARE THE OBJECTS OF CHASE IN THOSE COUNTRIES

BY

CAPTAIN FLACK

('THE RANGER')

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# PREFACE.

SINCE my contributions began to appear in the columns of 'The Field,' under the *nom de plume* of 'The Ranger,' the frequent questions put to me by sportsmen in search of some region where they might have mild winter quarters, as well as abundance of game, have led me to think that a book on the Quadrupeds, Game-birds, Wild-fowl, and other objects of sport in the Southern States of (North) America, might be both useful and interesting.

Having lived for many years in the South, and having devoted most of my time to hunting, shooting, and fishing, I can treat of the subject from my own experience.

I have added an Appendix as a guide to the expenses of a trip, and to the haunts where each kind of beast and bird may be found.

LONDON, 1866.

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# A HUNTER'S EXPERIENCES.

## CHAPTER I.

### HINTS ON FOREST AND PRAIRIE LIFE.

EVER since the days when Nimrod was a 'mighty hunter,' there has been a class of men who have pursued wild animals, not only for the sake of feeding, like wild beasts, upon their flesh, but out of pure love of the excitement attending the chase, a pride of mental and physical endurance which leads them to face boldly dangers and difficulties so discouraging to men of weaker mould, that to incur such hazard seems to them mere madness. Amongst those who have thus gone forth into the wilderness, the Anglo-Saxon race stands pre-eminent.

Nor is it for the sake of excitement alone that they put their lives in peril. Wherever the cause of science or commerce requires that discoveries

should be made, or geographical problems solved, we find the Englishman foremost; venturing with his frail bark and his reindeer sled amongst the icebergs of a frozen ocean in search of a north-west passage; laboriously tracing the Nile to its source, in unknown lands, amongst a fierce and savage people; braving the tropical heats and deadly miasmas of Central Africa; or working their way across the arid deserts of Australia, to set up land-marks, and point the way to future discoverers.

And in every phase of their wandering life they are attentively watched by those who are unable to accompany them. Elderly, staid, respectable gentlemen, with a slight inclination to Toryism, may profess to think it rather low to go rambling about over a whole continent, subsisting on the produce of the chase, and bartering Birmingham goods with naked savages; but when the name of one of our travellers is mentioned they cannot help feeling a pride in him, and reflecting that the same country gave them birth. The old man who knows what the gout is, suffers a little from indigestion, and is slightly disposed to asthma, looks with a touch of envy upon the bronzed, healthy face and keen eye of the rover, and wishes that his own step was as firm and light. With a sigh he thinks upon his bankers' account, and the years of toil which

have made him what he is; and would willingly give a cheque for a very large amount could he, by so doing, assure himself of one-tenth part of his robust hardihood.

Wherever commerce has established itself, the children of almost every nation under the sun may be seen jostling and pushing each other in the pursuit of golden treasures; but where nothing but perilous adventures may be expected, it is rare to meet any but Englishmen, or at all events men of Anglo-Saxon parentage. And of that race many names could be mentioned of men who, for the mere sake of enjoying Nature in all her loveliness, have willingly abandoned home to rove at will far away from the comforts and restraints of civilization.

And where does Nature assume a more beautiful aspect than on the mighty American continent, where dense forests stretch away for leagues, bounded only by some broad river whose impetuous flood could engulf all the tiny streams of England; while beyond, far as the eye can reach, and miles further, stretches a vast meadow of green, waving grass? Where can the hunter find game more worthy of his gun than in the wild woods and almost boundless prairies of the West; where the huge buffalo stalks in all his shaggy majesty; where the deer and antelope bound, where the boar and bear roam about the

dense thickets, and game birds of large size and delicious flavour are as plentiful as blackbirds in England? It is in pursuit of such game that many a wealthy Englishman has earned himself a name in sporting history, to the envy of young Nimrods, who would fain outvie the deeds of their more celebrated compeers.

Though my hair is not yet white with age, I can still say I was a young man when I first visited the prairies and woods of the West, where the best years of my life were passed, and I have often since regretted leaving those wild scenes; though why I did so is a question I have never been able to solve to my own satisfaction. Perhaps it was the effect of that very desire for change which first led me to the wilderness.

Often in my dreams I wander over the prairies; often in my waking moments I recall happy times spent in the woods; but now that I can no more take part in those inspiriting scenes, I cannot refrain from recording my experiences by flood and field, for the benefit of all who may feel inclined to pay a visit to those game-filled regions,—the Paradise of the true sportsman, and the 'happy hunting-grounds' of the Indian warrior.

In the prairies and forests of Texas, where I lived for years, a medium sportsman, with a good double-

shot gun and a brace of pointers, can kill quail and grouse to his heart's content. In the winter, the swamps, lakes, and rivers swarm with almost every kind of wild fowl, ducks, geese, swans, and two or three varieties of cranes. Should he be of a more ambitious disposition, and wish to try his skill on game of a larger size, bears and peccaries are always to be found in the cane-brakes and thickets; and if even this should fail to satisfy him, the great bison is to be found on the western prairies, where he can have adventures to his heart's content.

I once passed nearly a twelvemonth in the forest with no companions but my dogs, and no means of subsistence but the produce of my gun. My good thick blanket was my only bed, and a rude hut of branches piled and woven together, my home. It was only when powder and lead grew scarce that I returned to the settlements; and on once more reaching a spot where civilization had made some progress, I felt about as awkward as a Maori woman in a ball-room dress, and as fearful of doing wrong as a schoolboy may be on finding himself at his school gate after the holidays.

But no one need live this solitary hermit-like existence from choice, for in every little town it is easy enough to find two, three, or half-a-dozen comrades who desire no greater enjoyment than a month or two months of camp hunting; and, with-

out the guidance of some tolerably experienced hunter, who knows a little of the country and of woodcraft, it would not be advisable for a novice to venture many miles away from the haunts of men. In all probability he would be lost in the forest; and a man who has only seen forests, as they are called, in England, can form little idea of the extent and appearance of an American wilderness. Even the Hampshire New Forest, large in extent and diversified in appearance as it may seem to the eyes of a city-bred man, is but '*a patch*' upon the woods of the Southern States of America. In some parts, the trees, the undergrowth, and huge weeds are so matted together with briars and vines, that the hunter is literally compelled to hew a passage through them for hundreds of yards; while in other parts the trees stand as regularly, as far apart, as well trained, apparently, as in any English park, and as free from weeds and bushes. Sometimes, again, there are low flats the soil of which is as bare as a turnpike-road or a brick-field, while close by, and without any perceptible difference in the soil, is a tall growth of palmetto, sedge, and coarse grass. Further on may be seen a genuine cane-brake, where the reeds are of all sizes, from a crow-quill to a man's leg, and in height from three inches to thirty feet.

Cedar swamps are almost as impenetrable as the

canes. The trees are, perhaps, not quite so close together, but many of them lie on the ground; and then broken branches, concealed in a dense growth of rank grass, are ever ready, like so many iron spikes, to inflict wounds upon the intruder. On higher ground the wild peach-bush grows abundantly, and so thickly together that their tops shut out the light of heaven, and thus check all the undergrowth, though they spring to a sufficient height to allow the deer-stalker or still-hunter to exercise his calling with comparative freedom. In other thickets all the varied shrubs of America, hickory, dog-wood, thorn, grow close together, and present a most formidable array of sharp spikes.

Often, while wandering in the depths of the wilderness, the hunter will come upon some large, deep lake, whose placid waters will, in winter-time, reflect the floating form of thousands of wild fowl, and where (I am speaking only of the more southern of the United States, in which King Frost has no dominion) huge lilies float upon the mirror-like surface of the blue water. There, too, the wild beasts come to drink,—deer, hogs, panthers, and bears,—while wolves and wild cats hide in the thickets by the bank to seize the more weak and timid denizens of the wild,—themselves frequently becoming the prey of some alligator which lies like a huge log on the shore till food of some kind comes within his reach.

But the hunter's progress is often barred by impassable swamps, where vegetation runs riot and drops to decay; where amongst the tangled ferns, rushes, and long grass, the moccasin snake crawls forth from his den, and hisses its defiance to the intruder; where pools of stagnant water, covered with rank weeds, afford board and lodging to the toad; where the mass of vegetation breeds a vapour scarcely less poisonous than the noxious reptiles which it nourishes; where, on the top of tall, blasted pine trees, vultures sit, with bloated crops and glazed, sleepy eyes, trying to digest their carrion food.

But let me speak of more pleasant scenes—of a bubbling spring at the foot of a mossy bank, beneath the shade of some ancient tree, where the hunter, as he reposes, can watch the silver thread of water as it winds down the valley, till it loses itself in some larger stream, not poisoned yet by a foul manufactory.

But I feel that it is impossible to give on paper any adequate idea of the vastness and variety of an American wilderness,—so different from English forest scenery, where woodmen are constantly employed to 'keep the place tidy,' and withered branches are converted into faggots of fire-wood as soon as they fall. In the forests of Texas all is natural; the trees are planted by Nature's hand; they fall from decay or from the effects of a fierce tempest,—and where

they fall they rot; scarcely one in a thousand being used by the hunter for his camp fire.

The scenery, viewed from the surface of a river, exhibits an equal variety. The hunter is ascending one of the rivers (say the Brazos), sees on one side a dense mass of forest, the depth of which may be measured by yards or miles. On the other side is a precipitous bluff bank; and though the traveller cannot see up to the summit of it, he knows well enough that beyond it there is a wide, rolling expanse of prairie. Further on, the banks become so low that they scarcely confine the waters, and then the hunter sails betwixt groves of tall canes and weeds,—the luxuriant vegetation of a marsh. After some little progress, green meadows, as level as a bowling-alley, are seen on both sides, while buffaloes and wild horses and deer graze contentedly upon the soft grass.

When the hunter, be he white or red, roams these solitudes by himself, his very loneliness compels him to strain his senses to the utmost; and sometimes the exhibitions of keen intellect, displayed by the veterans of the forest, are surprising. The white hunter is, as a rule, far ahead of the Indian in that learning which the red-man formerly excelled in.

The extraordinary sagacity which many animals display in avoiding the snares of man,—the almost reasoning powers of the bee, the ant, the beaver, and

the bear, sink into nothingness compared with the cultivated intelligence of the men who make it their business to go forth into the wilderness and take the most wary animals in their dens.

The sight of the practised hunter is so cultivated, as to rival in delicacy of perception the touch of the blind man. The contact of a passing object with the trees, grass, or solid earth, leaves some slight trail, which, though imperceptible to the novice, can be read by the practised hunter as easily as the open page of a book. From such slight things as a broken twig, a bruised blade of grass, or a pebble that has been kicked from its bed in the softer earth, the learned in forest lore can not only tell what animal has crossed his path, but will be able to form a pretty correct estimate of the size and sex of the game, and the time that has elapsed since the 'sign' from which he draws his knowledge was made.

In this lies the great difference between the hunter and the sportsman. The former trusts to his own unaided intelligence and forest experience to bring him to his game, which his rifle then secures. The latter employs the keen scent of his dogs to bring him to the quarry, confining himself to the killing portion of the business.

The hasty stride and hurried movements of English sportsmen would be of little value in the backwoods. The hasty hunter would, in all probability, frighten

more game than he killed. The American, or Indian hunter, treads with the stealthy step of a panther. His eyes are around him, penetrating the thickets in search of the twitch of a tail or ear as a fly is driven away, or catching the sparkle of an eye as his game peers through the foliage. The ground is eagerly scanned for 'sign' as to what game has passed that way, and how long since. The bruised twigs of a bush tell him plainly enough that not long ago some lordly buck rubbed the velvet from his newly-developed antlers. Beneath a large tree are some 'turkey scratchings,' and other signs, in which a tiro would discern no difference, but the keen-sighted wood-ranger knows as well as if he had seen the animals, that a few hours ago a couple of the fierce Texan boars passed beneath that live oak tree.

Nor are the ears less diligently trained than the eyes. The hunter must mark with exactness the various sounds heard in the forest. He must be able to distinguish the fall of an acorn on the withered leaves from the jump of the squirrel that shook the nut from its husk, even though those sounds should proceed from a distance of a hundred yards.

Not only must he thus *know* the sounds of the forest; but, in order to be a successful hunter, he must be able to imitate them artistically. He must call upon his 'turkey-caller' in the spring with skill enough to lure the cunning old turkey-cock to his

destruction, by imitating the cry of the female, as in more northern regions they lure the bull-moose by lowing like the cow. In the latter sport the white hunter will never equal his red compeer, at least so says Lieutenant Hardy:—

'No white man has ever been able to imitate the call of the moose with such truthful resemblance to Nature as an Indian. A white man can call in the right key, and loud enough to be heard by a moose six miles off. He may even get an answer from a distant bull; but it is when the moose approaches that he fails, and the Indian tact comes into play. The cautious brute will stop sometimes a dozen times in the half-mile before coming in range of the hunter's rifle; and then it is that those extraordinary sounds, suppressed bellowings and gruntings, which are uttered by the Indian as if proceeding from the chest of a huge animal, allay suspicions, and cause him to come crashing wildly through the bushes to his destruction.'

The inexperienced hunter having succeeded in making his way *into* the forest, would, as I before hinted, feel himself sorely at a loss in finding his way out, unless he is accompanied by a hunter of judgment in woodcraft. Let him penetrate into a jungle where every tree seems twin-brother to its neighbour, and the space between them is filled up with vines and weeds which trip him up. He may know that the sun

rises in the east, and sets in the west, and, therefore, that his shadow will fall in a certain direction at a certain hour. This is all very well; but there are few men who retain self-possession enough to think of all this when first they find themselves astray in an American wilderness.

Let him once turn round, so as to forget in which direction he was going, and all his knowledge and self-confidence will most probably evaporate. It is not until the American hunter has had some little practice, under the tuition of others wiser than himself, that he will be able to put into use the various woodland signs, which may have been pointed out to him as finger-posts in case of emergency.

For example, he may have been told that the moss grows with greater profusion upon the northern side of a tree-trunk than upon the southern, and that the longer branches point towards the south; and, for a time, he may go on quietly enough, until he happens to come upon a damp soil where the moss grows in equal luxuriance upon both the northern and southern sides of the huge stems, and then he will begin to be a little puzzled to know what it means. When he looks up amongst the branches of the trees, his surprise and bewilderment will be increased ten-fold when he finds that the vegetation points with equal luxuriance to every quarter of the compass. Our tiro is certainly lost in the wood. No! He has still a shadow, and that

may enable him to extricate himself from his somewhat awkward 'fix.' He looks downwards, but no shadow is visible. The sky is overcast, and, even if it were not so, the light of the sun could scarcely penetrate through that mass of dense green foliage overhead.

How is he to get clear of the forest, now that both moss and trees combine to delude him, and there is no shadow? Why,—by making a shadow.

'But, surely, you cannot do so!' he will say, 'Now the sun is obscured by the clouds: Pray explain that?'

It is quite true that the sky is so overcast with clouds that your body will throw no shadow; but still one may be produced from the shining blade of your hunting-knife; and it can be done thus: Hold the knife by the extreme end of its handle perpendicularly, so that the point shall rest upon your thumb-nail. A shadow will then be cast across the nail from the sun, whose position will thus be determined; and then, if you can give a pretty good guess at the time of day, your position north, east, south, and west, can be decided with tolerable accuracy.

It is impossible for the backwood's-man to know every tree on his beat, with the familiarity of an English forester, who goes over the same ground frequently; but he must know the *lay of the forest*, and which way the river that divides it runs, or the outlines of the prairie that skirts it, so that he may

be able to strike out at once towards the desired point.

A man, when lost in the forest—'greenhorns' I mean, who cannot steer without a compass—invariably bears to the left; though I am not aware that there is any positive or decided reason for so doing.* But still this is a fact which has often been proved by experienced trackers, both white and red, who have in many instances traced lost persons to some spot not far from the point of departure.

Sometimes grand sights are seen in the woods:—a dense jungle or cane-break is set on fire, perhaps by lightening, or by the carelessness of some hunter. Thousands of acres will fall a prey to the flames; and the sight once seen, will never be forgotten.

High above everything, rising up towards the sky of deep blue, roll dense masses of smoke. Below, the red flames leap and twist and twine round the trees like thousands of huge fiery serpents, as they consume the light vines, and scorch the branches of the oaks. The canes blaze and crack with a loud noise, much resembling a continued fire of musketry. At once the wild inhabitants of the wood, both four-footed and winged, fly for their lives, in frantic terror. The clumsy bear, although he looks so slow and heavy,

* The left leg being generally less powerful than the right, may, insensibly of course, be outpaced by the stronger limb. This is mere supposition, but it may account for it.

forces his way swiftly through the canes. The stealthy panther glides along with equal rapidity and less noise. Terrified herds of wild cattle dash through the jungle by sheer force of numbers and weight, snapping the thick canes as though they were bullrushes. The frightened deer rush swiftly through the more open parts of the wood towards the prairie; while high over head the turkey, snipe, and other birds, fly in straight lines towards a secure resting place.

The hunter also must hasten away, either to the prairie or to a stream of water broad enough to arrest the progress of the flames; and he may have even to fire the prairie in order to insure his safety.

The life which I passed in Texas as a hunter, I may well call happy. The planters and settlers were (and I believe the war has not altered them) the kindest and most hospitable people it has ever been my lot to meet. It was sometimes, indeed, a matter of difficulty to get away from the jovial hosts who cared little what happened provided the stranger would make one in a day's deer-drive, in a fishing party, or even a week's camp-hunt. Nothing less than a solemn promise of a speedy return could procure release from their hospitable houses.

For my own part, like many others, I preferred a wild, roving, independent life in the wilderness to the luxuries of a settled home. Parties were made up of men, inured to the fatigues and dangers of forest-life,

and, two or three together, we would form a home in the woods, twelve or fifteen miles from any other human habitation; supplying the nearest town with turkeys, wild fowl, and venison so long as it remained plentiful in our neighbourhood; and, when it began to grow scarce, we would change our camping ground, perhaps taking up a position on the very opposite side of the same town, at a distance of twenty-five or thirty miles away from our old hunting grounds.

We could then begin once more to kill the deer and turkeys with renewed success, and with a far greater relish for our wild life after, perhaps, two or three days spent in the town while passing on our way to our new quarters.

Tramping continually through the woods, and living in a pure atmosphere, the forest-hunter acquires a keen appetite, to satisfy which he kills and cooks. He differs perhaps from M. Soyer in his method of preparing food, and a turtle-fed alderman would probably turn up his nose at the repast. But in spite of this his dishes are by no means to be despised. Fish are cooked in a very primitive, though effectual manner, without having their scales removed. They are well wrapped up in broad leaves, and buried in the hot ashes and sand beneath the fire. They thus retain all their sweetness and juices. Haunches of venison are cooked to a turn before log-fires, and there is no fear of the soot coming down the chimney and spoiling the roast. Ribs and

kidneys can be grilled on the hot coals, or a deer's head baked in a forest oven.

This oven is simply a hole dug in the ground, and heated by making a fire in and over it. When it is thoroughly hot, the head is wrapped in moss or long grass, and placed in the hole over which the embers are then raked back. Of course the skin is not taken off until the head is cooked, which takes at least a couple of hours to accomplish. It then peels off nicely; the meat smokes on the bark dish; and, with just a sprinkling of red pepper on it, is a feast fit for anyone in the world.

On the prairies the hunter's life is very similar, although the game is slightly different. Instead of bears and turkeys, the hunter kills buffaloes, or more properly bisons, and prong-horned antelopes.

There are few real prairies * to be found on the east side of the Mississippi; but on the western side of that mighty stream they extend longitudinally from the ice-bound coast of the Arctic Ocean, to the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The Eastern States are, as a rule, heavily timbered; the open ground being generally swampy. The little glades of high ground are, from their small age, unworthy of the name of prairie. According to Humboldt, the true prairie country contains an area of 2,430,000 square miles.

* Nothing more than forest glades, not prairies as understood in America, though they may be *meadows*.

There are four different kinds of prairies, though I sincerely trust the English hunter who visits America in search of game may never have occasion to hunt on the fourth, which consists only of barren sands. There are several of these deserts, but none so large in extent or so well known as that lying to the south of Santa Fé, which bears the dismal name of Jornada del Muerte (Journey of Death.)

Of course, so vast an area of prairie land presents a great variety of climate, as well as of animal and vegetable produce. On the frozen plains of the north, a stunted growth of grass barely suffices to save the reindeer from starvation. In the central regions the climate is temperate, and the prairies produce a large quantity of vegetable food for the support of the many animals that roam over them. To the south, where the sun is more powerful, there grows a thick tall grass, sometimes reaching higher than a horse's belly, though there are spots where the herbage has been consumed, and the surface presents a sweet, succulent, short food for the animals that eagerly seek it.

From the west bank of the Mississippi to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, the prairie stretches, being neither a horizontal plain nor a continuous meadow. There are many streams,—tributaries to the great river,—and these streams have generally along their banks small detached groups of trees, the cotton-

wood (*Populus angulata*) being most frequently seen. The surface of the land is uneven, so that the visible horizon is seldom at a very great distance.

These are the dry or rolling prairies, upon which feed vast herds of bison, numbering sometimes from 40,000 to 50,000 head. Here, too, may be found the common deer (*Cervus Virginianus*) as well as its black-tailed kinsman; and although they do not herd together in such numbers as the bison, two or three hundred may frequently be seen in a space of a square mile, adding beauty to the park-like scenery. The Wapiti, or elk, the prong-horned antelope, the wild horse, with coyotes, or prairie wolves, and hares, all live upon the rolling prairie; and at night the silence of the huge plain is often broken by the howling of wolves, or by frantic lowings of some buffalo cow at the loss of her calf.

On the flat grounds are frequently found large patches of weeds and briars, and swamps covered with a rank growth of reeds and rushes. These are called the 'weed prairies.' The vegetation consists principally of wild coffee bushes, poison-vines, milk-weed, flags, and gramma-grass. Any hunter who is not afraid of walking ankle-deep or knee-deep in the mud of winter can have the most varied shooting. You put your foot on a tussock of grass that promises firm standing-ground, when up flies a snipe from beneath your foot, and a few yards on a bittern

is kicked up. There is scarcely time to load before a great brown rail flies away (in a very sneaking fashion) through the tops of the weeds. On the ponds are to be seen plenty of ducks, widgeon (*Anas Americana*), green-winged teal (*A. Carolinensis*), as well as the more savoury blue-winged teal (*A. discors.*) If dogs are at hand when a briar-patch is reached, two or three shots at woodcock may fairly be calculated on. The American bird is not so large as the European by about three ounces in weight, and at least four inches in the stretch of the wings—this is, however, fully treated in another chapter.

On one occasion I was riding with a friend to try and jump deer. We had double shot-guns, but no lead smaller than buckshot. On our return home we crossed a portion of a swampy 'weed prairie,' where the snipes (*Scolopax Wilsonii*) were walking about in the mud, almost too tame to move away from our horses' feet. I longed for a lighter gun and smaller shot; but that, unfortunately, was ten miles away. I feel confident that there were at least a thousand snipe scattered about that part of the marsh which we crossed.

The sand prairies are found far away to the extreme west, by the spurs of the Rocky Mountains. The only vegetation upon them consists of a few stunted bushes of wild sage; the only game a species of grouse called the sage-hen, and a few rabbits. Their

flesh is so strongly impregnated with the flavour and odour of their food as to be unpalatable to any civilized people. A wretched tribe of Indians, called Diggers, live about the outskirts of these deserts, and seem satisfied with the scanty subsistence obtained from such game. The white hunters seldom visit these prairies from choice.

The timber prairies are perhaps the prettiest of all, being dotted over with evergreen oaks (*Quercus virens*) either singly or in small groups, with occasionally smaller trees. These clusters of trees go by the name of 'mottes' or 'timber islands.'

Compared with the others, the timber prairies are small in extent, and are found only in the neighbourhood of heavily-timbered river bottoms. They are the favourite haunts of the wild turkey, as there the weary birds can roll themselves in the dust, or pick insects from the grass, and yet have a shelter near at hand to run to on the appearance of any enemy.

In Texas the prairies are flat near the coast, extending inwards for scores of miles; after that they become rolling or hilly till they finally reach the mountains. In the summer time the ponds formed by the rain dry up, and then comes a wonderfully rapid growth of tall grass, amongst which the deer take refuge from the flies and other stinging insects.

The game then is plentiful; the climate, save in some few marshy districts, is healthy; and it may be fairly

asked, why enterprising Englishmen do not try their rifles on the plains of America, by way of change from the Highlands of Scotland? Surely, the most slaughter-seeking sportsman could hardly desire a greater profusion of birds and animals, than can be found in those wild scenes.

The deer, both in the prairie and the forest, are in best condition during the hottest months,—July, August, and September. They are then hunted on those days following moonlight nights, in the style known as 'jumping;' the hunter being armed with a heavy double gun, charged with good large buck-shot, about the size of marrow-fat peas.

In October a smaller bore may be used; and with good pointers, plenty of sport at quail and grouse may be had. The grouse are very easy birds to kill as they lie well to the dogs, and when flushed, fly in a straight line, though their flight is sometimes continued for more than a mile. But then on the prairies it is very easy to mark them down, at least when the young hunter becomes accustomed to the long range of vision which he can command. In winter they flock together, and both morning and evening they are to be found pretty near the timber, but in the middle of the day they roam far out into the prairie.

The American hunters call the quails *partridges*; and these show first-rate sport to anyone provided with good dogs. They fly straight and but for a short distance,

so that they can be marked to almost a yard. In Texas they are so numerous and prolific that, if it were not for the *vermin*, in English keepers' phrase, the country would be overrun with them. They are often caught in a very wholesale manner by the negroes in traps, called partridge-pens.

The winter in Texas is as mild as an English April, so that the hunter can always ply his vocation. There are mule-rabbits and smaller hares, grouse, quail, and upon the ponds, ducks, snipes, and widgeon. Few native-born hunters use shot-guns. The rifle is their pet weapon, and they seldom trouble themselves to shoot small game.

During the spring months of the year the settlers are in the habit of setting the prairies on fire, for the purpose of clearing off the old and coarse grass, that it may be replaced by a sweet young growth. Some States allow this by law, though in the extreme West laws can hardly be said to exist; at all events, they are seldom carried into execution, and therefore the prairies are frequently set alight, either from accident, or from a wanton spirit of caprice, or mischief.

Not less grand than the forest on fire is the prairie, when seen in a mass of blazing flames. The smoke rolls up heavenward in dense, heavy, black columns, while, beneath, the flames leap and dart in one red line extending for miles. At night the whole horizon appears like the gates of Tophet, and then can be heard

more distinctly than in the day time, the crackling caused by the fierce flames as they lick up the light grass and reeds in their onward course.

Instances are not wanting of bands of Indians, or even parties of white emigrants, losing their lives in these fierce fires; especially if they have been overtaken where the grass is four, five, or six feet in height. In such cases it forms an impediment through which a man cannot travel so fast as the flames behind him.

On an ordinary prairie the traveller can generally make his escape, if he acts with promptness, and does not lose his presence of mind. If he fires the prairie *before him* he can gradually advance, so that by the time the flames behind him reach the spot, he is scores of yards off on the smoking ashes which his own hand has caused. Sometimes it happens that streams, or chasms (cañons), check the progress of the flames, or a sandy ridge intervenes, or a part which has recently been burned, on which the grass has not yet attained sufficient growth to serve as fuel. But at other times, when the wind is rough, showers of sparks, overleaping these barriers, continue the work of destruction on the other side.

During the time I hunted in Texas with companions, for the purpose of supplying a town, we generally camped four together, and divided the labour in the following manner:

One of the party would go to the town nearly every

day with our venison and turkeys, as the heat of the climate would spoil the meat if kept long. A camp-keeper was left to take charge of our goods and chattels, and to have supper provided for the remaining two when they returned from the forest in the evening. These offices were generally undertaken in rotation, except when we had a visitor—some clerk or tradesman from the town, who wished to see wild life—and when this occurred we generally *elected* him to the duties of camp-keeper.

The company being made up, the next thing was to decide upon a proper spot—one that combined all the advantages of wood for fire, water for ourselves and horses, grass for the horses, and plenty of game to kill. This point being settled, we would start from town so as to arrive there early in the afternoon, and put things in order for the next day's sporting, and there was more to be done than may perhaps be imagined. A rude shanty of logs and branches, thatched with palmetto, had to be constructed for our shelter, beds were to be prepared, the cattle to be watered and staked out on the grassy plain to graze, and our own supper to be cooked. Frequently we had to kill meat on the first evening, in order that we and the dogs might have food to eat. The haunches of our deer were the only parts saleable, so that we and the dogs came in for the fore-quarters—food, to which I should not at all object at the present time.

Our bear-hunting season seldom began before October, except when we were called upon to punish the depredations of some shaggy brute, who had become too bold and persevering in his systematic robberies. The still-hunters, or stalkers, would very frequently see Bruin, during the mast season, sitting on his haunches under some oak tree, far too much interested in his employment to take the slightest notice of the stealthy tread of the hunter, who intended to give him some more solid food in the shape of a bunch of lead.

The first wild bear I ever had the pleasure of seeing was up in a tree, feasting upon wild grapes. When he heard my footsteps he began to descend in the cautious manner observed by stout old ladies in descending to the cabin of a steamboat; that is, he came down gently, stern foremost for half his way. But a charge of buck-shot in the side of his neck disturbed his equilibrium, and he suddenly fell to the ground 'in a heap.'

In the winter months the wild hogs and peccaries are in their best condition after feeding plentifully upon the mast, together with nearly every kind of beast and bird that make up the list of Texan game.

Every man in the camp was expected to do his share of work. The hunters had to kill two deer or two turkeys each before breakfasting, and one deer before returning to supper, when possible. Turkey-

shooting rarely succeeded during the evening's hunt, as it was too late for them. Dogs were very seldom used to trail a wounded deer. The hunters preferred to follow him, if possible, by means of the drops of blood upon the grass and leaves, being of opinion that the barking of a dog would disturb the other game, and so spoil the forest for our hunting purposes; but still, rather than lose the game altogether, a single dog would be put upon the trail.

The routine of daily life was something in this style: Before daylight, the man whose duty it was to take care of the camp during the day, roused his comrades, who at once started up, and prepared their hunting-gear for the morning's sport; and while this was doing, the camp-keeper would replenish the smouldering fire, and prepare a cup of hot coffee, with just a suspicion of whisky in it. Long before the sights of the rifle were plainly visible the hunters were away, each taking his beat in the forest as previously agreed upon.

While they were absent, the camp-keeper's duty was to sweep out the hut, roll up the blankets, and procure wood for the fire, as well as to stake the horses in a fresh pasturage. When he had done this, green coffee-beans had to be parched in the frying-pan, and ground, so as to make another jorum of hot strong coffee against the return of his companions.

According to their success the hunters were early

or late in their return, and each man then saddled his horse and returned to the forest for the purpose of bringing his game to the camp, from the spot where it lay; unless they happened to have killed turkeys, which were packed in on the hunter's back. It once fell to my luck to kill five turkeys (gobblers) in a short space of time, although at the distance of nearly two miles from the camp. As they averaged twenty-five pounds each, it can easily be imagined that my shoulders ached by the time I reached our camp fire.

Of course, no regular breakfast hour could be observed. Each man prepared his own food; and then made ready his game for market, skinning the deer, or plucking the turkeys, as the case might be. Then the day was passed as each man fancied, till evening began to draw on, and it was time to prepare for the evening hunt. Some played at cards, although money was very seldom staked; others cleaned and oiled their arms; dogs were fed; or a rifle-match would be held in some shady glade, the target usually employed being a dollar, or a piece of paper cut that size, and fixed to a tree. The usual distance was one hundred yards; and, although it may sound egotistical, most excellent shooting was generally made.

I frequently paid a visit to the editor of the local paper when I attended market with the game; and for the present of a turkey, which cost me nothing but a little powder and lead, would obtain a bundle of his

old impressions, or a fugitive magazine. Nearly every town and village in the United States has a paper of some kind—the editors exchanging their little sheets with each other for scores of miles round. The literature I thus procured from my editorial friends often enabled me to pass a happy hour, when my comrades were complaining of dullness.*

When the meat was sent to market two horses were employed upon the expedition, the venison being packed in large bags and placed upon the back of one while the other carried the turkeys. The whole expedition was placed under the charge of the hunter whose turn it was to be salesman.

On arriving at the town he had to go round to the taverns, and to the merchants, and others, who usually purchased our venison; the game thus being brought to the doors of our customers. As soon as the load was disposed of, he had to procure all things required at our camp to serve till the next visit—powder, shot, coffee, sugar, salt, and a little flour, not forgetting the whisky and tobacco. The necessary purchases having been made, he returned as quickly as possible to the camp where his presence was anxiously expected, especially if we had chanced to be short of any of the little things comprised in the list of our necessaries and luxuries.

* They had the same access to the papers, magazines, &c., as myself, but they cared less about reading.

If we wished to drive deer, we generally proceeded to a distant part, where our regular hunting ground ran no risk of being disturbed; but we seldom indulged in this last-named sport while hunting for a settlement. If no dogs are used, unless in cases of great emergency, and if the hunters are thoroughly up to their business, a tract of forest and prairie can be hunted, day after day, for a very long time, without making the game wild.

Perhaps the reader may be induced to say that our time might have been more profitably employed; and that may be true. We did not make very much money by our hunting; but still the expenses were not very great, so that what we did receive was nearly all clear gain. We were not troubled by any landlord; the tax-collector was afraid of losing himself; there were no butcher's bills; so that all our outlay was for ammunition, flour or meal, coffee, sugar, salt, tobacco and whisky.

Provisions, such as these, are very cheap, sugar being made close at hand, tobacco was grown not far off, and green coffee-berries cost but threepence per pound weight.

The prices were generally a dollar for a good fat buck's haunch, the same price for a turkey-cock, and half that for a hen-turkey, or a small haunch of doe venison. Grouse, wild ducks, or widgeons, averaged a quarter of a dollar, or about a shilling English money;

geese and cranes half a dollar; and we thought ourselves lucky to be able to dispose of quails, plovers, or snipes at a dime, or fivepence, each.

At times we made excursions into the buffalo country, to slaughter that huge game in a style to be presently described. The skins are valuable, and the meat, when jerked or sun-dried, has a sale in the markets of Mexico and Texas, though it does not command a great price. The excitement of a buffalo hunt is a good recompense for the fatigues of the journey to its haunts.

The mode of life which I have endeavoured to describe is well suited to the climate.

Deer being in best condition during the hottest months, it is much more pleasant to hunt them in early morning, late evening, or by the light of a bright moon, than to toil through the forests beneath the heat of a tropical sun. In the month of July I have killed stags which cut at least two inches of fat upon the brisket.

The hunter who tries his skill in the woods for the first time will find the turkeys the most difficult game to kill, as they are excessively shy even in districts where they have never been hunted. Their legs carry them out of danger at a swift rate, when warned by their keen eyes or quick ears. To hunt turkeys without an experienced comrade would simply be waste of time on the part of the novice.

After a little practice, the novice will find it no great difficulty to stalk a deer or antelope, or to lure them up within range of his rifle by the simple expedient of exciting their curiosity. In inquisitiveness, ladies must yield the palm to the graceful members of the deer tribe or the swift prong-horn.

If the young sportsman sticks to his shot-gun, and commits fearful havoc amongst the grouse, the sport will be pleasant enough for a few days. There are no keepers to be 'tipped' after each day's shooting; no boundaries over which he may not pass. But, in a day or two, he will be over-stocked with game, which he will in vain desire to get rid of in the usual manner. Unless he should happen to be near a town few people will care to accept his game as a present. In our camp-hunts we never shot them unless specially desired, and then could only get the prices above mentioned.

With plenty of game at hand those prices gave us a living; and, for my own part, I fancy it was better to lead this wild life than to accumulate wealth in a certainly less agreeable and, perhaps, less just manner. I much regret that ever I left those hunting grounds to become once more a dweller in cities.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BISON.

VULGO BUFFALO—BOS AMERICANUS—TAURUS MEXICANUS—BŒUF SAVAGE—AMERICAN BULL.

THE bison, or buffalo, is one of the noblest victims sacrificed to the love of sport. The Indian destroys him for food, and to exhibit his prowess; while the white hunter kills the buffalo for sport, for food, and for profit. The peculiar interest attaching to the bison is attributable, perhaps, to his immense size and strength, his shaggy, ferocious appearance, as well as the boundless extent of prairie over which he ranges.

Our information with regard to this animal (thanks to the enterprising sportsmen and naturalists who have hunted him in his native haunts), is tolerably complete and authentic.

In times gone by it is very probable that no part of the American continent was unvisited by them, although the Eastern States, from being so heavily wooded, were not so much frequented by the bison as the vast unbroken prairies of the southern and

'western districts. Little mention is made of them by the early settlers, and in a 'History of Carolina' the fact of two having been killed is mentioned as a remarkable circumstance. They were formerly to be met with in considerable numbers in Pennsylvania and Kentucky, though the deadly rifle of the rapidly increasing white population has now driven them from those States. It is recorded of the celebrated Daniel Boone, the pioneer settler, or rather the discoverer of the State of Kentucky,—a man who had been trained as a hunter from his earliest days,—that after crossing the Mississippi he was perfectly astounded at the number of these animals. From this circumstance it seems very probable that the vast rolling prairies between the great river—the 'Father of Waters,' have always been their great feeding grounds, and that those seen in the Eastern States had crossed the water accidentally.

The term 'Father of Waters' is, by-the-by, a very free rendering of the Indian name of the great American river. In the language of the Choctaw tribe, *Missah* and *Sippah*, are two words very commonly used; the former meaning 'old big,' the latter 'strong.' It would be very difficult to find a more appropriate name for the mighty stream which drains a whole continent than the compound of these two adjectives, Missah-sippah, or Old-big-strong.

In the summer-time bison are found as far north

as latitude 63°, and are frequently met with in the neighbourhood of the salt-licks. They retreat towards the south on the approach of winter, and are nearly always to be found about Northern Texas, Sonora, and New Mexico. Immense herds of them are constantly roaming over the prairies watered by the Arkansas, Platte, Missouri, and the upper branches of the Saskatchewan. The settlers on the banks of the Red River have a camp-hunt regularly every year, taking their families off to the prairies for six weeks or two months at a time. These excursions supply them with sufficient meat to last them through the winter. The hides are either sold or used for domestic purposes. In Canada, a well-dressed buffalo-skin blanket is worth from 3*l.* to 4*l.*

Through all the above-named regions the bison wanders in quest of food. Being rather a dainty feeder he prefers the young, tender grass which springs up after a prairie fire has cleared away the old coarse herbage, and in winter-time he scrapes away the snow with his feet to reach the greensward.

The buffalo is certainly a most extraordinary-looking beast, a strange mixture of the comic and the ferocious, the head and fore-quarters being very large, and appearing more so from being covered with a thick coating of shaggy hair, which grows over all the head and neck, sometimes reaching a length of ten or twelve inches. Beneath this is an undergrowth of soft crisp

wool. The whole body is protected by a kind of woolly covering, which the animal sheds every summer; and after performing this operation, the bison, when viewed from a distance, somewhat resembles a French poodle on a large scale. The scanty proportions of the tail heighten the likeness. It is short, covered with a short fur-like substance, and has a tuft of coarse black hair at the end.

The buffalo is a strong, deep-chested animal, with short stout legs, though the manner in which the body slopes down from the hump makes it appear weak in the loins.

Sixteen hundred pounds is not an uncommon weight for a full-grown bull, and they are said to reach two thousand pounds weight; but this may be questioned, for the hunters are not in the habit of carrying with them any machine by which they could weigh the dead carcase even by quarters. Some allowance must be made for the roughness of the hunters' guess, and the love of exaggeration common to most of them.

A full-sized bull measures as much as eight feet six inches in length, exclusive of the tail, which measures barely two feet. At the shoulders, which on account of the hump forms the highest point, he stands nearly six feet.

This hump is a mass of fatty substance, of various sizes, according to circumstances and the condition of the animal, and is much esteemed by epicures. When

the animal is in poor condition, this fat seems to waste itself, most probably in lubricating the strong muscles attached to the last cervical and first dorsal vertebræ. These muscles are admirably suited to support the weight of the beast's large head. The bulls are seldom found in so good condition as the cows, nor is their flesh considered equal in delicacy. Buffalo cows have been killed with more than two inches of fat on the hump or boss, and half that quantity on the sides and ribs.

The colour of this large animal is a liver or umber brown, and in the summer has a glossy appearance; but towards the winter it becomes paler in hue, and before it is shed is of a gingery, dull, yellowish-brown tint. This shedding of the coat begins to take place about the month of February, and shows first between the fore-legs, around the udder in the female, and on the inside of the thighs. The long hairs then fall gradually but irregularly, leaving some parts of the skin almost naked, while other portions are covered with loosely-hanging hair and wool, giving the animal an extremely ragged and miserable appearance. While shedding his coat, the bison frequents woody districts, rubbing himself against trees and bushes to aid the work of nature. The coat is not thoroughly renewed until some time later in the year.

The buffalo has been pursued by the Indians with far greater ease and much more certainty of success

since the time that the Spaniards first introduced the horse into America. The red-skin warrior trains his steed to the chase, as he trains his child to the war-path. The white man, possessing as much courage as the savage, and armed with infinitely more deadly weapons, even surpasses the Indian in the slaughter of this gigantic game, killing ten where the Indian kills one; so that although we cannot determine the precise time for the extinction of the buffalo, there is no doubt as to his ultimate fate. Thousands of hides are procured every year by the agents of one trading company.

The hunter of the present day who desires to chase the bison must leave the cities of the Northern and Eastern States far behind him, and, mounted on a good horse, take his course into the Indian country of the south and west, towards the great rocky chain of mountains which forms the backbone of America. He must banish himself to the prairies.

It is not less difficult for a writer to describe a prairie in words than it is for a painter to depict one on his canvass. Even the traveller, when he first stands upon the outskirts of one of these immense plains, fails to comprehend its full extent, although his view is confined only by the horizon. But when day after day has been passed in the saddle, and night after night in the plain of waving grass, which extends on every side as far as the eye can reach,

he begins to form some conception of the immensity of an American prairie. Baron Humboldt, as before stated, estimates the true prairie country at 2,430,000 square miles. But though the prairie appears thus smooth and unbroken to the eye, it is frequently furrowed by large chasms, or cañons, while in some parts small streams are to be met with, the banks of which are fringed with an undergrowth of shrubs, with here and there a few cotton trees (*Populus angulata*). One or two large rivers cross the prairies, such as the Kansas and the Arkansas; but upon their banks no timber large enough to make a fishing-rod is to be found for miles. In nearly every case the rivers and cañons are hidden from view till the prairie-wanderer is close upon them. In the regions of New Mexico are to be found sand prairies, corresponding in many respects with the African deserts. The chief of these is the *Jornada del Muerte*, more commonly called *El Llano Estocada*, or 'The Staked Plain.' It is so named from the fact of some traders having erected rows of stakes at certain distances to guide them across its arid wastes. It is more than seventy miles across, and entirely without water. Bleached skeletons of horses and mules that have died of thirst, are scattered over the dreary plain.

But these desolate regions are not the true home of the buffalo. He prefers a land where food is plentiful, and his instinct generally guides him aright.

Over the boundless grassy plains the buffalo roams in vast herds, as far as the eye can reach, covering the whole landscape, till their diminished forms appear in the distance like so many black spots on the horizon. These prairies are the true buffalo-grounds, and on them the bison is hunted by white-man and red-skin.

If the hunter can conceal himself in some ravine or hollow, and watch a herd of buffalo when they suppose themselves to be in perfect security, he will, on witnessing their frolic, suppose them to be a most careless, jolly, dare-devil set of animals, full of fun and sport. They will throw up the grass with their horns, scatter the turf in every direction with their hoofs, and, in a very rough kind of sport, butt at each other with almost as much force as two rival engines meeting each other on a line of railway. In spite of the violence of the shock, these encounters are seldom known to result fatally to the animals; most probably owing to the immense strength of the spinous process, as well as to the quantity of hair about their foreheads.

During the rutting season, however, these mimic fights give place to the most desperate encounters, and at that time it is dangerous to approach them, as they charge with the utmost violence at anything they see or smell. A close view of one of these wild bulls will convince the spectator how terrible an antagonist a

buffalo would be when thoroughly aroused, or enraged by a slight wound.

When the bull has chosen a mate from the herd of cows, he generally remains with her till she is about to drop her calf. These calves generally fall in April and May, sometimes earlier. The females usually retire from the herd singly, or several in company, to some remote spot, away from the usual haunts of wolves and bears, and there produce their young—seldom more than one at a birth. These young generally follow the mother till shortly before she is ready to drop another calf. If it should happen that they are attacked by wolves, the old ones charge the enemy in a most determined manner, frequently succeeding in driving him away altogether. This is more frequently the case when several cows are together, for sometimes the wolf is able to secure the calf when protected only by its mother. The buffalo seldom breeds till three years old, but continues to propagate its species till it reaches a great age. Though the cows and bulls herd separately during a considerable portion of the year, a large herd of females is generally accompanied by one or two bulls.

Many a man of rank and fortune has left this country for the express purpose of pursuing this mighty game upon the vast plains where Nature appears in all her glory and majesty; and to those who for a time would forget the artificial life of the

Old World, we say, 'Hie to the West, go far beyond the outposts of civilization, and you will be amply rewarded for the toil and tediousness of your journey. There will you find thousands of bisons, which you may hunt for sport, or for the purpose of studying their habits as they graze and ramble over the prairies, migrating from one tract to another, crossing water-courses, or swimming rivers at places where they can reach a sand-bar or shoal midway in the river, where they rest a short time before they direct their course to the opposite shore.'

The Indians hunt buffalo in various ways. One or two small unimportant tribes hamstring their game, but they are despised by the larger and more sporting tribes. The manner in which they perform the operation is this: They procure a long pole forked at the lightest end, and across this fork an old knife or razor-blade is fixed, the edge of which is brought to as fine an edge as possible; then mounting their horses they run up to and hamstring the buffalo at the moment when the tendon is at its greatest tension, taking care to sever the tendon upon the side opposite to the direction in which the horse's head is pointed, so that the buffalo may fall *away* from the path of the horse. If a mistake is made, both horse and rider are very likely to have a roll on the prairie. The Indians who kill buffalo in this style belong chiefly to the Ta-wa-ki-nas and Waco tribes, inhabiting the plains

of Texas. The Sioux in the North, and the Comanches in the South, hunt in a more legitimate style—they are the true buffalo-hunters.

The buffalo-hunter must exercise great caution in advancing towards a herd of these animals, taking every advantage of the wind and of the ground if it be at all uneven. Great silence, too, must be kept, although their sense of smell is more acute than that of hearing.

In all probability the earliest method employed for the wholesale destruction of the buffalo was that of driving a whole herd over a precipice into the chasm beneath. When a herd once takes to flight, it holds a straight course, for it can scarcely be turned, and the Indians, well aware of this fact, would of course take advantage of it. This sport, or rather murder, was practised thus: A spot would be chosen upon one of the many cañons which intersect the great plains where the banks of the chasm were perfectly level and unbroken, and at a spot where the precipice descended abruptly for a hundred feet or more. Then the red-hunters would gather 'buffalo chips,' the prairie *bois de vache*, which they piled up at regular distances about twenty yards apart; these, being so treated as to represent men, were arranged in two rows, beginning at the cañon and the wings, gradually extending outwards, till at their extremities they were at least half-a-mile asunder. Having thus placed their *dummies*, the Indians would cautiously surround a herd and

endeavour to direct its course towards this *cul-de-sac*; and when the head of the flying herd had once entered the space between the chips, they would increase the panic by means of shouts and arrow-shots, till the whole of the fated cattle tumbled pell-mell over each other into the ravine beneath. African travellers have described a somewhat similar method as employed by the negroes with success. But since the horse has been introduced by the Spaniards the drive has seldom been resorted to, inasmuch as the prairie Indians are nearly all well-mounted, and can therefore pursue the buffalo with greater likelihood of success.

The Indian warrior in hunting uses a strong bow, which, however, is seldom more than two feet and a-half in length, a short weapon being more convenient to handle on horseback. It is made sometimes of wood (generally of the *Bois d'arc*, or Osage orange), with sinews glued upon the back of it; and with this the hunter can send an arrow, tipped with flint, clean through the body of a huge bull, and leave it quivering in the turf beyond.

The horses are fleet, hardy mustangs, seldom encumbered with saddle or bridle, and the riders carry very little besides the bow and arrows and a knife. From the neck of the steed trails a long rope of plaited hide called the *larriette*, or *larriat*, a corruption of the French word *l'arrêt*. This is used because

the hair-rope, *lasso*, *cabresto*, or *cabros*, would become injured or unravelled by constantly dragging on the ground, while the well-greased *larriat* slides along with little danger of injury from damp or friction. Of course it can on occasion be used as a *lasso* to throw over a buffalo's head; but its chief use and object is, that by grasping it the rider can check his horse, and so recover his steed, should he have the misfortune to be thrown.

The trained horses are so well broken that the slightest pressure of the rider's leg is sufficient to make them change their course. Others, less accustomed to the chase, are bridled in a peculiar, though most effective manner. A thin cord of plaited hair, not much thicker than whipcord, is fastened round the lower jaw, and this is amply sufficient to stop the horse. An eagle's or flamingo's feather stuck jauntily in the scalp-lock, with a cloth or skin round the loins, constitutes the rider's dress.

By the time the sun rises over the horizon, the whole band of Indians is ready for the hunt. Around them, on every side, stretches a vast prairie where, while the hoofs of their horses crush down thousands of sweet-scented flowers, the warriors can have a foretaste of those 'happy hunting grounds' which they believe will be theirs after death. Surely, in their wildest dreams, they could scarcely imagine a more beautiful land or a greater profusion of game. The

prairie has the appearance of a variegated carpet; the long beams of the morning sun cause the dew-drops to glisten like diamonds, till at length the heat becomes more intense, and they vanish.

The buffaloes are plentifully dotted over the plain, some browsing, others reclining at their ease, while others, in play or in real combat, rush at each other with a force that nearly sends them back on their haunches. The cows and the young calves feed in the centre, guarded by the old bulls, who graze around the outside of the herd, and occasionally utter their deep roar, which sounds in the distance like thunder. According to Audubon, the bellowing of a herd of a thousand buffaloes has been heard, in calm weather, at the distance of ten miles.

To the hunters the buffalo-chase is a field of glory in which they may gain honour, second only to that of the war-path. The old warriors have to sustain their reputation for skill and courage; the young have to prove themselves worthy sons of their fathers; and those who had the misfortune to be unsuccessful upon the last hunt have to retrieve their somewhat damaged character, and so escape being condemned to perform the menial offices of a squaw. On every side, no matter by what motives they may be actuated, the same excitement and anxiety prevails. All are eager to commence the work of slaughter, and deal out death and destruction amongst the gigantic game.

Some of the band have been started off at an early hour to out-flank the herd and direct it towards the hunter. In order to do this, it is necessary to get to the windward of the buffaloes, which, as soon as they scent the enemy, rush off at full speed *with the wind* towards the danger, which they wish to avoid.

The hunters are all expectation; and at length their patience is rewarded. A movement is seen on the extreme verge of the horizon. The old bulls utter their warning note, and all huddle up together, as though to hold a bovine parliament, and consider the best means of escape. But this state of indecision does not last long. As the scent of the out-flanking enemy becomes stronger, they fly with the wind, and endeavour to outstrip its speed. The Indian scouts add their yells to the clamour, and suddenly the main body of hunters, who have hitherto been in part concealed, make their appearance. Then begins the hurly-burly of the chase. The buffaloes scatter in every direction over the plain, and warriors, both old and young, dash wildly off in pursuit, yelling like demons,—each man selecting his animal, and striving to separate it from the herd. The time has arrived for the young warrior to earn a reputation.

Let us watch yon middle-aged warrior, who has singled out a monster bull, one of the patriarchs of the herd. The huge animal bounds along head downwards, his great shaggy mane tossing about in the

breeze, while the game little horse which the Indian bestrides, gains upon the uncouth creature at every step. The warrior is a strong man, with sinewy arms and shoulders, on which the muscles are as plainly developed as in a piece of sculpture.

The Indian draws an arrow from his quiver, fits it to his bowstring, and then releases it on its deadly mission. In an instant it pierces through the heart of the huge game. At the moment when the feathered shaft flew, the warrior's left leg was pressed to his horse's side, and the well-trained animal instantly, as the bowstring twanged, obeyed the signal and turned round to the right so suddenly, that a rider unaccustomed to buffalo hunting would certainly have been thrown from his seat.

The Indian, however, has practised that stratagem for years past, though in the present instance there is no charge to avoid. The huge bull staggers, and falls heavily forward to the earth—the blood gushing in torrents from mouth and nostrils, as well as from the arrow-wound in his side. The warrior then sends up his triumphant shout, ending with a long quaver, sounding like — how-how-poo-oo-oo-ah; and, having thus proclaimed his success, presses both legs to the side of his steed, and starts off to single out and slay some new victim.

For the animal just killed he has no care. No other warrior will claim the spoils of the dead—for the

peculiar make, feathering, or colouring, of the fatal shaft will tell plainly enough to Indian eyes to whom the game belongs. When the hunt is over, the labours of the women commence; and the squaw will have no difficulty in selecting her husband's game. When the skin, the tongue, and the hump, have been taken from the carcase the squaws deliver the arrows to the owners, and if any have been badly shot so that it required a second shaft to kill the huge game, or if any have been wasted in mere flesh wounds, the unsuccessful hunter is exposed to jeers and sarcasm, from which he is only too glad to escape by hiding himself.

There goes a youth following a huge bison. Being light in weight and well-mounted, he is enabled speedily to range alongside the shaggy monster. It is, perhaps, his first buffalo-hunt; and although he understands the theory of the chase well enough, practice is wanting. His looks betray his excitement. His tawny cheeks are flushed with anxiety. But although he is evidently bent on distinguishing himself, his frame seems to show a lack of the muscle necessary to propel the death-dealing shafts with certainty of success.

He fits his arrow and draws the bowstring; but either from want of force or from nervousness, it glances from a rib of the buffalo and runs up under the skin where it hangs, swinging backward and forward with every motion of the great game. The expression of the bull's

eyes changes from fear to rage. Another arrow is drawn from the quiver and launched at the bull. This time it is too far back, and the bull continues his headlong career, though his bloodshot eyes indicate the mischievous bent of his mind, and the young warrior had best be on his guard. But the youth is vexed at his want of skill, and still presses on the game. Another shaft flies from the bow with lightning speed; and with equal agility the buffalo turns upon the hunter.

But the brave steed is a more experienced bison-hunter than his rider, and at this critical moment saves his master's life. The mustang turns on its heels as on a pivot and, shooting by the buffalo's hind-quarters, saves both himself and his rider.

The young warrior will have to wait some time before he can lay claim to the title of a 'brave' and a 'hunter.' He has wasted three arrows without killing his game, and is almost sorry he escaped from the bison's horns, so much does he dread the ridicule with which the squaws will greet him.

Now a far different-looking warrior comes in view. His hair is the colour of silver, his limbs seem shrunken, and are decorated with many scalps torn from the heads of white or red foemen. His eye is bright, his mouth thin and compressed. But it is soon evident that those shrunken limbs are of strong bone and tough muscle. There is no lack of power, although the warrior has

long since passed middle age, and is a great authority on all matters connected with *the war-path* or *the chase.*

He places an arrow on his bowstring, which he draws back till the ends of the strong weapon nearly meet. The arrow speeds its way, crashes through a broad rib through the huge body, and buries its head at least six inches in the turf. A rifle-bullet would not have forced such a passage through the bison's body; and the huge animal at once topples over, and dies by the side of the blood-stained shaft.

Another Indian sweeps by in hot chase of a furious bison. His arrow speeds, and quivers in the animal's side. A frown flits across the hunter's face. He presses his horse alongside the bull; leans over and plucks the ineffectual shaft from the wound. Again he fits it to the string, and this time buries it in the body of his quarry.

There may be seen two monster bisons closely followed by a pair of hunters, each anxious to outvie the other. One is an elderly man, with stern cold features, while the other is a young man in the prime of life and vigour.

On they press; the younger anxious to have the first shot at the shaggy game, and so earn a fame as great as that of his rival. He presses both legs to the sides of his steed, fixes his arrow, but in his excitement and hurry inflicts only a trifling wound. The

old hunter, though his features showed it not, had seen all that was passing in the mind of his youthful rival. He resolves to profit by the occasion. He places the arrow upon the string, which he draws till the tough *bois d'arc* bow-points nearly meet, and in an instant his bull rolls dead upon the prairie. With a smile of derision on his countenance, he turns towards his younger and unsuccessful comrade, and utters the triumphant shout.

The young man, goaded by the taunting yell, and anxious to retrieve his fame, presses upon the bull which he had only wounded, more closely than is safe. The irritated bison suddenly turns, and sends both steed and rider rolling on the prairie. The young chief leaps from his fallen horse with the speed of thought, and launches a second arrow at the bull. It is aimed with better success, and the huge quarry falls dead beside the horse. That young chief will scarcely dare join the circle round the camp-fire at night. He has had his horse killed under him, he has shot two arrows at the game, and he fears to face the criticism of the old hunter, whose keen eyes marked everything, though his tongue was mute.

But three hours have passed away in the run, the buffaloes are dispersed, and the hunters are returning from their work of slaughter. The squaws, who have been anxiously looking on, now go forth to commence their disgusting labours of skinning the beasts and

bringing home the meat. The prairie wolves and the buzzards scent the banquet which awaits them, when the choice portions of the carcase have been removed to the Indian camp, and hover about until they can approach with safety to gorge themselves on bison-flesh, which, on every side, plentifully litters the prairie. But the beauty of the scene has vanished, the flowers are trodden down by pursued and pursuers, —the prairie is red with blood.

The athletic American hunter, who pursues the game for a livelihood as well as from love of sport, frolics about over the prairies like a schoolboy, and thoroughly enjoys a run at buffalo. Many years ago (it is, perhaps, as well not to say exactly how many), I made one of a party who started out to run buffalo on the plains of Texas. Whatever may be the date of that buffalo hunt, I shall only say that ladies who were babies then are now wives and mothers.

Fort P—— on the upper waters of the Brazos, was the name of the frontier-post of which Colonel G——, an officer of Uncle Sam's dragoons, was the commandant. The country around had once been a favourite hunting-ground of the Indians, but they had been compelled to give way before the adventurous Texan settlers, and were necessitated to seek their game further to the north-west. It would have been very difficult to imagine a more beautiful country than those wide savannahs, which were here and there

dotted with small clumps of live oak trees, or magnolias, amongst which the Old World visitor each moment expected to see the mansion of some fine old English gentleman peering through the park-like scenery.

The second morning after my arrival at Fort P——, a buffalo-hunt took place in which I took part. My own horse being fatigued with many days' travel, the worthy Commandant placed at my disposal one of his trained buffalo horses; and, on as fine a spring morning as could well be imagined—although, by the way, all spring mornings are beautiful in Texas—we sallied forth. Colonel G—— carried one of Sharp's breech-loading rifles—a most rare weapon in those days. A brace of subalterns were armed with Colonel Colt's celebrated revolvers, or 'six shooters,' as they were more commonly called, these weapons being always used by the army. A hunter, named Harris, who was attached to the military station in the capacity of professional hunter and provider of game, bore a weapon without which he seldom travelled, namely, a long rifle, with which he was an unerring shot. For my own part, I adhered to a very old friend—a short double-shot gun, loaded with ball in each barrel. I had several loose bullets in my pocket, for the convenience of loading afterwards while running at a gallop, as the bullets, when well wetted in the mouth, could easily be dropped down the barrel of the gun,

and the damp causing the powder to adhere to it, would suffice to keep the leaden missile in its place for a short time.

Off we started in high spirits, while the antelopes, and other small animals, bounded away in alarm; but as we were in search of buffalo, not one of the party would condescend to waste a shot on such insignificant trifles—even the prong-horns were perfectly safe.

Our horses pranced away over the short flower-sprinkled grass, disturbing myriads of humming insects which flew and buzzed around us, angry at being disturbed from their repast. Then through marshy spots, where tall reeds reached to our shoulders, and would have concealed us entirely had we been dismounted, we came to a tract of long waving grass which had escaped the prairie fires of the preceding year, and which now reached a height of from three to four feet.

Our horses seemed quite as anxious for sport as we. They shook their heads, flourished their tails, and pranced on snorting and pricking up their ears in thorough wantonness and health. A few turkey-buzzards were seen wheeling through the air a long distance off, looking no bigger than humble-bees, as their dark forms stood out like spots upon the white fleecy clouds which were beginning to rise, their presence betokening wind.

'You see them thar birds, stranger,' said the hunter, 'I'll stake high there's buffalo not far off.'

'Yes, but how about the wind, Harris?' asked the Colonel.

'Of course that thar cloud means wind; but, I reckon it wont come till nigh night time, and then it'll blow hard from the norrard. Still, I reckon, it'll be better to fall back and get below the swell, and so ride round 'em to the westward. When we makes a rush at 'em, a good many of the brutes 'll bolt towards the Fort, and we'll play at *that* lot if you've no objection, Colonel, because it'll be all the handier for getting in the meat.'

During the few moments employed in delivering this oracular speech, we had reached the summit of a swell, or undulation, of the great plain, from which we could discern, at a long distance, the dark forms of the masses of buffalo. We had been riding nearly south from the Fort, and a smart breeze was blowing from the south-east. I imagined that it was just possible we might approach the herd undiscovered, by riding straight on till we were within fair distance for charging.

The hunter, however, did not feel inclined to leave anything to chance; remarking, that it was quite possible (though it did not appear very probable) that the wind might shift round more to the south, in which case the buffaloes would smell our approach, and

at once start off at such a rate, that we should never be able to come up with them. So the hunter's plan, being warmly approved by the Colonel, an old hand at the sport, we fell back as quickly as possible, and were soon hidden from the quickest-sighted bull of the herd, though we had much more to fear from the noses of the animals. Three-quarters of an hour brought us to the proper spot for charging, as the distance from swell to swell was not very great.

The final preparations were then made. Each man dismounted, looked to his saddle-girths, shortened his stirrup-leathers by a couple of holes, and having loosened the thong of stout buckskin, which served as a curb to the bit of his bridle, fastened his *sombrero* to his saddle, so that its broad brim should not flap in his face, and in its place bound a pocket-handkerchief round his temples to screen his head from the sun; for though we dwellers in the South are less liable, from the thinness of our blood, to attacks of sun-stroke than dwellers in more northern lands, it is as well to protect the head as much as possible from the hot rays which begin to make their power felt almost as soon as the sun rises above the horizon. Last of all, the weapons—rifles and pistols—were carefully inspected, and with the greatest anxiety we waited the signal to charge the herd.

'Are you all ready?' asked the Colonel.

'All right!' was the response from every man.

'Run at them, then,' shouted Harris: 'dash at the lower side of the mob, and do all you can to start them homewards.'

'Forward, lads!' shouted the Colonel, perhaps fancying for the moment that he was charging a body of Mexican cavalry.

Off we charged down the slope at full speed, and had covered nearly half-a-mile of ground before we were perceived by the animals; but as soon as it was evident that they had discovered us, we dashed right at them, each man endeavouring to ride out his particular beast.

To those who have only read of bison hunting, it may perhaps appear no very difficult task to separate a particular animal from the herd. But when the tiro comes to put his well-read theory into practice it will not appear so easy, as the animals invariably seek for safety in company. It is almost impossible to turn a single buffalo, except by inciting him to an angry charge, while it is altogether out of the question to make a herd change its course. Attempts to frighten the whole herd by any combination of yells and screams are useless, for the thunder of their hoofs, as they gallop over the turf, drowns all lesser noises. A '*motte*,' or a fire, alone can make them deviate from their course.

With tails raised high in the air, the buffaloes run close together, their horns rattling against each other,

while the horses trained to the sport strive, equally with their riders, to separate some special object of pursuit. This once accomplished, it would be easy work to range alongside the huge quarry and bring it to the ground by a well-directed fire.

'Go it!' yelled the Colonel, as he endeavoured to force a fine fat cow from the rest of the herd.

'Lay on!' shouted Harris, the hunter; 'Stir 'em up, they're all a-boiling!'

As he spoke he pulled his horse right up on its haunches; his long rifle was raised for an instant, and as the white smoke puffed from the barrel, the bull rolled over and over in a cloud of dust.

The earth trembled beneath the rapid gallop of the countless herd, and a dull rumbling sound was heard, which entirely deadened all other sounds. Dense clouds of dust were raised by the thousands of flying hoofs, which, together with the crack of rifle and pistol, made the scene resemble in some degree a battle-field. The hunters were all, with the exception of myself, peppering away as rapidly as they could, the revolvers of the two subalterns being heard constantly, as they plied the flying herd with leaden bullets. It was time to begin action myself, if I would earn any laurels in the chase. My horse was luckily well-trained to the sport, and I soon found that he understood it quite as well as I did. He galloped along at a pretty pace till we came

close upon the herd, when I at once felt a change take place in his behaviour. He fairly trembled with excitement as, with head thrown forward and ears laid back, he bit viciously at the air and hurried forward, with a fire and determination which not even a chain-cable would have restrained. I could only guide him, and, indeed, felt pleased when I found that I still possessed the power to direct his headlong career.

We were going at a most awful pace when I selected a monster bull, and ranged alongside of him. Throwing the gun over the forepart of my bridle-arm, I pressed the trigger. The moment the report was heard, my horse turned on his heels as on a pivot, nearly throwing me, so sudden was the movement. At that instant the buffalo rolled over, raising a cloud of dust in its fall. The animal was shot through the backbone, just beyond the hips; but the wound, though severe, was not immediately mortal. The huge beast raised himself up on his forelegs, shook his shaggy mane savagely as he uttered a low growl of defiance, while his eyes flashed with anger, terrible to behold.

It will be a long time before the image of that animal is absent from my mind. Dismounting, as soon as I was well satisfied that the shaggy monster was too much injured to be able to rise, I gazed upon him. His head and shoulders seemed like the fore-quarters of a lion fearfully caricatured, to which

the short curved horns and wild gleaming eyes gave a more savage and ferocious appearance. But this expression soon changed when he had made one or two fruitless efforts, and had discovered his inability to rise. His bold look of defiance and anger changed to an aspect of seeming regret, and heart-sick pain. His dark eyes became more mild and beautiful, in appearance as those of a doe. His gaze wandered across the prairie in the direction where the forms of his uninjured companions were rapidly lessening in the distance. The sight of the sufferings of this gigantic brute cooled my ardour, and for a short space of time more kindly feelings overpowered the hunting instinct which was so strong within me. Had it been in my power, I would, then and there, on the instant, have restored that bull to health and strength, even though well aware that he would immediately have charged at me. In that case I should, at all events, have had the plea of self-defence to lay as flattering unction to my soul.

The end, however, was at hand. The stream of blood which flowed from the wound drained his strength. He shivered—gave a low moan—and rolled over. A thrill passed through the huge carcase, and all was still. The wild ranger of the prairies was dead.

I hastily remounted, and galloped forward to escape from the regret which began to steal over me. In the hurry of the chase I soon found relief for my

feelings. We sallied in pursuit of a fine fat cow, and my good steed soon enabled me to roll her over dead with the contents of my second barrel; after which I stood for a time watching the exploits of my companions, who were killing on every side.

But the reckless waste of life and food was sickening, and there seemed to be little of chivalry in an encounter with a brute, whose huge strength alone was insufficient to enable him to cope with man armed with the deadly rifle.

Though the risk in buffalo hunting is considerable, yet there is some profit to those who kill it for means of subsistence, but it is sincerely to be hoped that both Indians and white men will see the necessity of using moderation in the slaughter of this useful animal,—the largest and noblest wild quadruped found on the American continent.

## CHAPTER III.

### WILD CATTLE.

#### BOS TAURUS.

TILL the discovery of the New World by Columbus, no cattle except the bison, or, as they are commonly called in America, buffaloes, roamed its forests or its prairies; and the inhabitants of the whole continent, from 'the land of fire' to the frozen North, knew no more of them than of the horse. Both the domestic cow and the horse were introduced by the conquerors of Mexico—Cortez, and his companions in arms—and now both are to be found in immense numbers; the horses generally keeping to the plains, and the horned-cattle to the forests.

The wild cattle are mostly descended from the large Spanish cattle first introduced into the country, but they have been largely crossed of late, *i.e.* during the last half-century, with American cattle, the descendants of English breeds.

This being the case, there is little to describe, as the wild cow shot in the forest resembles, in all respects, its brethren who daily feel the pole-axe of our

English butchers, so that, in treating of wild cattle hunting, I shall confine myself to one or two personal adventures.

In all my varied hunting experience, I think the narrowest *shave* I ever had was from a wounded wild bull. It happened in the *Brazos bottom*, a wilderness of forest, of immense extent. I was armed with a double smooth-bore, loaded with ball, each weighing about an ounce, and mounted on my best hunting-horse, having with me three trained cattle-dogs, nearly full-bred mastiffs. In fact, as I supposed, everything was in my favour; and yet, well-mounted, armed, and accompanied by dogs on which I could rely, I nearly came to grief.

I had been riding about an hour, looking for cattle 'sign,' dung, tracks, or the strong bovine scent given out by wild cattle when you are near them, before the dewdrops have disappeared under the sun's powers (I had, as usual, started as soon as it was light enough for me to ride), when all at once my dogs darted into a thicket, and in a few seconds I heard their voices, and then the crash of trees, bushes, and saplings, as they were struck or pushed aside by the rush of some powerful beast, which seemed to be making in my direction.

Presently, from out of the bending covert, a great red bull came rushing with his great head bent

towards the ground, and his tufted tail stretched out behind him. He passed me as I sat on horseback, at about twelve yards' distance; but his rush had startled my horse, who, usually most steady under fire, or in almost any circumstances of danger and difficulty, became fidgety, and I put my bullets, when I fired, too far back, so that, as I afterwards discovered, I only 'paunched' the bull.

After loading my gun I hid my horse in a thicket, as I was afraid the wounded bull might charge him if he happened to see him; and as soon as he was safe I bolted off in the direction where I heard my dogs baying the bull, in a palmetto swamp close by. The paunch wounds had probably sickened him, and made him halt so soon. I tried to stalk him through the stunted swamp palmettos, but the ground was soft and I sank ankle-deep, or more, at each step, and as there was no tree of any kind to dodge the bull, in the event of my making a bad shot, I thought it would be best to get him upon firmer ground and where the trees were thicker. So I cheered the dogs from the edge of the palmetto swamp, and they soon forced him to leave for more favourable ground, until he came to bay by the side of a large elm. A huge live oak stood about thirty yards from the bull. I crept up under its shelter and fired at him; but as he was engaged in trying to gore the dogs, and was swaying his head from side to side in

vain attempts to reach them, I could not make a certain shot, and I missed him.

The flash of the gun discovered me, and my adversary rushed at me like a steam-engine. Depending upon my left-hand barrel I awaited his rush, and when he was nearly at the muzzle of my gun I fired again, but failed to drop him. I had waited almost too long, and when I turned to dodge him round the tree his hot breath was in my face; his eyes, glaring like red-hot coals, were close to mine, and as I turned I fell—a lucky fall for me, for his horns, which would have pierced my body, only stripped me of my hunting shirt.

The vicious charge carried the bull at least thirty yards beyond the oak at whose roots I had fallen; and this, with the worrying of my dogs, gave me time to swing myself up into the tree,—but not a moment too soon, for before I was well out of his reach he was beneath me.

My jailer was in a terrible rage, and seemed to care no more for the bites and barks of the dogs than if they had been chickens. His eyes were bloodshot, he bellowed hoarsely, and pawed up the ground with his feet, throwing the sods of tufted grass far behind him.

That he was badly wounded, the blood-stained foam which flecked his forequarters proved. Nor had I escaped scatheless. My fall, and perhaps a blow from

the bull's head, when he stripped my fringed hunting-shirt from my back, had shaken and bruised me, and it was some little time before I was ready to think of means to extricate myself from my awkward position—the prisoner of a wounded bull.

My hunting-knife still remained in its sheath—the shock of my fall had not made me lose it—and I determined to try and stab my enemy; but before I could put this in practice the bull began to reel. His wounds were beginning to tell. Most likely he had been internally bleeding, and in two or three minutes, with a low moan, he fell to the ground and died.

The *vagueros*, or stock-raisers, in the South are always glad to have these wild cattle destroyed, and I shall here recall an occasion in which I accompanied one of these men with his herders, on a 'roping' or lassoing expedition. At the time of which I speak I lived on the Gulf prairie, in a sheltered nook formed by a bend of the forest, in which secure retreat, surrounded by forest and prairie game, with plenty of wild fowl in the winter, I passed two happy years of a hunter's life, my rifle and shot-gun supporting myself and dogs, whilst my horses grazed free of expense on the prairie around my cabin.

Sitting one evening under a large live oak which shaded my log-shanty from the Southern mid-day sun, and smoking my pipe whilst I occasionally turned

to my venison ribs which I was roasting for my supper, my dogs sitting around with expectant faces, Old Mose, my 'slow-track' hound, suddenly turned his head and set up a yell. His example was immediately followed by his companions, and upon looking in the direction to which their heads were turned, I saw three horsemen riding towards my wigwam, and upon their nearer approach I recognized one of them to be a stock-owner whose 'ranche' was four or five miles from me. His companions were two Mexicans in his employ as herdsmen or *vaqueros*.

Greeting my visitor, who dismounted, whilst the Mexicans unsaddled and staked out his horse and their own animals on the prairie grass, after they had watered them at a slough a short distance from my place, I, after the custom of the wilderness, handed him a tumbler and gourd of whisky. After he had imbibed the 'loving cup' I pointed to the carcase of the deer from which my roast had been cut, and told him 'to help himself.' After the Mexicans had attended to the horses, I gave them a brand from my fire, and telling them to cut some venison for themselves, they were soon busy cooking and eating their suppers.

My visitor's errand was soon told. He had come with his men to try and lasso a head or two of wild cattle, should any of the herds be feeding far enough from the timber to admit of a successful run.

The preparations for bed are few and simple in the 'sunny South.' The Mexicans, after smoking a cigaritta or two, and taking a final look at the horses, rolled themselves up in their blankets, their heads resting on their saddles, and were soon in 'the land of dreams.' Lonus, the stock-raiser, sat and chatted with me long after his swarthy followers were asleep; but even we did not make it late. So, lending him a bear-skin to spread beneath his under blanket, I saw him coil himself up for the night, and then retired to my moss-bed in the shanty.

Betimes in the morning, and long before the sun had given even a warning of his appearance, our breakfasts had been cooked and eaten, and the horses saddled and mounted. We held our way up the edge of the timber, riding in silence, every ear strained to catch a distant sound, or the bellowing of a cow as she called her calf, and we tried to catch a taint of the bovine smell on the balmy morning breeze which blew directly into our faces, and which scent, under favourable circumstances, can be discerned for a very long distance. My companions had, for their weapons of the chase, a good stout lasso each, made of sun-dried hide, strong enough, almost, to hold a frigate; but my own was a short, heavy, double gun, with an ounce ball in each barrel. At last we could hear the distant lowing of the herd, and caught 'upon the tainted gale' nasal assurance of their whereabouts. We then sought the

cover of the forest, there to wait until the morning became light enough for our enterprise.

My companions sat like statues upon their horses, as they were to be employed in the run; but I, who intended to watch my companions, judging pretty well that, in the confusion of the charge, some of the cattle would be nearly certain to run within shot, preferred to hunt on foot, and, therefore, secured my horse in a dog-wood thicket. When it was light enough, I followed the others on foot until they got opposite the herd, who, feeding in gradually towards the forest, were now about four hundred yards distant on the prairie.

'*Vamos, hombres, vamos*!' shouted Lonus, and with the word the three horsemen rushed at the herd. The lassoes whirled rapidly round their heads, as each, selecting a victim, singled it out for a cast of his rope. Lonus had chosen a good-sized cow, and in his hurry, just as he was about to make his cast, failed to notice a stout pedan tree, which stood alone upon the prairie. At the very instant when his rope encircled the horns of the quarry, his horse ran upon one side of the tree, and the cow on the other. Down came pursued and pursuer in a cloud of dust upon the prairie; for as the tree caught the rope and shortened it, the good steed had no time to brace himself for the jerk which inevitably comes when the quarry tightens the rough raw hide. At this moment each of the Mexicans had

fastened to an animal, and having enough to do to hold their own, could give no assistance to their master. Meanwhile, I was not unemployed. A bull, followed by a plump calf of three or four months, came towards the tree behind which I was concealed. Allowing the bull to go by, I stopped the 'young un' with a ball through the heart and, loading as I ran, hastened to Lonus' assistance.

I was just in time to save the horse, the rider having rolled himself out of the way; for if I had not then arrived, the cow, which had first gained its legs, and had made many frantic but vain efforts to break away, turned its rage upon the horse, which, unable to regain its feet, would in another instant have been gored by the wild cow, had I not in the nick of time sent a ball through its brain. Lonus got off with several bruises and a dislocated collar-bone; but we soon put that back again in its place, after despatching his men for a wagon to bring home the meat. So ended our morning's hunt. Had it not been for the accident, I should most likely have bagged another; but, at all events, we got one animal for each hunter.

It is rough work and, perhaps, does not tell well; but those who have tried it love the excitement with all its drawbacks.

The coast of Florida is studded with creeks and inlets, with, here and there, islands standing in the mouths of rivers. Some of these islands are of large

area, while others are mere dots on the surface of the waters. The shore and the larger islands are the most beautiful spots that can be imagined—forests and green prairies being seemingly mixed up together; while, here and there, a house shows that man has already put in a claim, and is willing to combat for possession of this lovely region with the wild denizens of the woods. One of the largest of these islands had been the plantation of a wealthy gentleman who had allowed it to run to waste for some reason or other; and thither I repaired one fine day along with my friend Colonel A——, who had permission to hunt, shoot, fish, or do anything he pleased. The house and, in fact, the whole estate had been left to the care of a group of some half-dozen negroes — slaves they were then — who seemed to have nothing to do but raise pigs and cultivate pumpkins for their own eating, and snare all manner of small game with which the island abounded.

But our object was not to destroy hares or partridges, but to kill certain members of a herd of wild cattle; a race of splendid animals as wild as the buffaloes of the western prairies, but infinitely more fierce and dangerous. A dozen years ago they were domesticated quietly at the plantation, but when that was abandoned by the owner, these fine cattle were suffered to roam about the island, growing more untameable with each successive generation. At all times and seasons, these haughty animals that have usurped possession of the

island, are ready and willing to charge at any object that may excite their anger; while, in open lists, they would bid defiance to the boldest and most expert Spanish matadores.

Colonel A—— was well known by all the darkies, having, on several other occasions, killed wild cattle there. As we rode up towards the old planter's deserted house, he gave a loud blast upon his horn, which at once drew them from the various holes and corners where they had bestowed themselves.

'Whoop! dar dey comes:—deres Massa Colonel! come to shoot ole cow—dere dey is!—come out dat, you black niggars.'

Such were the sounds which saluted our ears, and at the same moment a pack of curs of all ages, and every possible breed or cross-breed, appeared upon the scene, adding their howlings and barkings to the general tumult.

'Mornin' gemmen! Yah! old bull round about dis mornin' make lots o' tracks,—and, Massa Colonel, dat ole bull am more savagous dan ebber since you was down here lass.'

So spake the leader of the gang of sable islanders, while the others stood grinning and laughing, as if that were the only object they had in life,—debating on the merits of their own particular dogs.

'Silence, you chattering lunatic crows!' exclaimed the Colonel. 'If I had my way, you should all be at

work in a sugar-mill.—Away with you! Don't stand there grinning and chattering. One would suppose you hadn't seen a "quarter" for ten years past. Here, you Sambo!'

'Yes, Massa Colonel.'

'You and Jem go down with the dogs to the bayou, and if the cattle are there, turn them up this way, where we can get a crack at them.'

Another of the black clan was despatched into the interior of the house with instructions to have a lunch prepared by the time we returned. We then looked to our weapons and rode towards the spot where the wild cattle were expected to appear. Very soon the old negro is heard making uncouth noises on his cow-horn, and then comes the yelping of the whole pack. The chase now comes into view, through an opening in the trees. Some twenty wild cattle are plunging forward, flying from an undefined danger; but seeing human beings before them, they lower their heads and charge savagely. The well-trained horses skilfully wheel aside, while our revolvers are heard. As shot after shot is dealt, the herd is scattered in every direction; while hunters, dogs and negroes join in the *melée*. A huge bull measures his length on the earth; so does a negro, who is prostrated by a strong application of cow-heel. The cattle are savage as can be, and toss the dogs aside with their sharp-pointed horns. One of the darkies has been compelled

to take refuge in a tree from the assaults of a wounded bull, which vents its ire upon his straw hat. Suddenly a horse comes galloping past riderless. I recognise it at once as Colonel A——'s horse; and as I look around I see that gallant officer himself taking long strides over the ground, while close behind him is the patriarch bull of the herd, whose anger has evidently been aroused. With head down and tail extended horizontally, he plunged onwards; while I, hastily loading my rifle, dashed to my friend's assistance. Just as the bull had so far gained upon his victim that I expected each moment to see him tossed in the air, the Colonel caught hold of a huge palmetto tree which stood in the way, and whirled himself round its trunk; while the bull, with a loud roar, swept past, furious at being disappointed of his expected sport with the Colonel's body.

Again he turned to charge, and as he did so, I seized the opportunity of sending one ball through his skull, while another sank deep into his chest. The negroes sang loud songs of triumph at the death of his foe, while Colonel A—— wiped the perspiration from his brow.

The herd being thus scattered, we began to chase the yearling calves, and this was quite as exciting a sport, although a degree less dangerous. We caught them with the lasso; but it was no easy task to elude, or parry, the fierce onslaught of these calves, which

seemed to have drawn savageness from their mothers' udder. One of the negroes, after many attempts to capture a calf, seized the brute by the tail, threw himself from his horse on to the body of the calf, and thus bore it to the earth.

At length, when we had slain victims enough to supply the neighbourhood with beef, we returned to the house;—and thus ended our wild cattle hunt.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE WILD HORSE, OR MUSTANG.

EQUUS—MEXICAN CABALLO.

THE wild horse, or mustang, roams those 'rolling prairies' west of the Mississippi, which stretch from thence to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and longitudinally from the frozen Arctic seas to the warm waters of the Mexican Gulf.

These prairies he inhabits in common with the bison, the elk, or wapite, the antelope, and the common and black-tailed deer, and here he is often seen in herds of more than a thousand head.

The rapidity with which the wild horses have increased in the New World is very surprising, when it is remembered that little more than three hundred years ago no horse existed on the American continent. Western Texas, from its vast plains of luxuriant grass and its warm climate, seems to be the favourite home of the wild horse; and here he is found in the greatest perfection, proving the truth of the Arab's proverb, that 'the nearer the sun, the nobler the steed.' These mustangs, who graze under the glowing sun of Texas,

are wonderful horses for endurance. I once rode a small grey mustang about eighty-six miles, across a prairie, scorched by a July sun, without water or shade, in less than twelve hours. I was informed that the thermometer had marked all day long in the shade 98°, and in the sun—the sun to which we had been exposed—it could not have been less than from 120° to 130°. When I reached the rancho my horse showed no signs of distress, eat with a good appetite, and doubtless could have carried me half as far again that evening. This endurance and patience under heat they have doubtless received from their Arab sires, who, first of all transplanted into Spain from Barbary by the Moors, were afterwards imported into the New World by Cortez and his fellow-warriors, who would naturally carry over their best and favourite steeds for the conquest of such a country.

They are beautifully formed, active, hardy, docile, easily trained for war or the chase, and very affectionate to their masters when they have kind ones. They are of all colours, greys, bays, blacks, browns, chestnuts, &c., but the most common colours are piebald and cream-coloured, the latter being called 'clay-bank' by the Americans, whilst the former (piebalds) are more poetically termed by the Mexicans *pinto*, or painted.

It is one of the most beautiful sights in the world to see a herd grazing peacefully on the flower-decked prairie at early dawn on a spring morning. To see the

old patriarch keeping the young horses of the herd in order whilst the mares, accompanied by their foals, graze peacefully along. The gazer, if from the old country, thinks of Mazeppa and Lord Byron's lines as he watches these,—

'By spur and bridle undefiled.'

and repeats, almost without thinking, those other lines:—

'A thousand horse, and none to ride,
With flowing tail, and flying mane;
Wide nostrils—never stretched by pain,
Mouths bloodless to the bit and rein,
And feet that iron never shod,
And flanks unscarr'd by spur or rod;
A thousand horse, the wild, the free,
Like waves that follow o'er the sea,
Went thickly thundering on.'

The wild horse is caught either with the lasso, by penning, or by cutting foals off from their mothers. For lassoing the ropes used are of two kinds, from forty to fifty feet long. Those made of twisted tail-hair are called *cabrestos*. These are generally preferred by white men as they are freer from grease and 'kinks' than those about to be described. The hide rope, or *lariat*, is made of raw-hide thongs plaited, and this has often to be greased with salted grease to keep them pliable, as the dew and occasional showers otherwise make them hard. The *lariat* is stronger than the *cabrestos*.

Both the Mexicans and Californians are very expert in the use of these ropes; nor is this wonderful, for from infancy they are brought up with a rope in their hands. At first it is a mere string, but with their years it is increased in size. At first the child is content to lasso ducks and fowls; when older, he encircles the goats' horns or the pigs' throats with his string till, by degrees, he is at last able to lasso a wild bull or a wild horse.

To catch a wild horse the hunter has to approach the herd not less cautiously than he would draw near any other game. He rides against the wind towards the herd, taking advantage of every inequality in the ground; nor does he fail to throw himself alongside his horse if he finds himself detected by the wild horses, thus making his steed appear riderless.

When he has gained such a position as he wishes, he rushes at the herd at the top speed of his horse, and when within reach of his victim, he whirls the lasso round his head, and launches it at the quarry. As soon as the rope encircles the neck of the horse it soon renders itself helpless by choking, in its frantic struggles to get loose. His captor immediately puts his saddle and bridle upon his new acquisition, girthing him till he nearly cuts him in two, and allowing the horse to spring to his legs, as instantaneously he gains the saddle. Vain are the struggles of the horse to unseat his rider. He might as well try to cast his skin, for

whether he rears, or plunges, or bucks, the rider smokes his cigaritta complacently. In an hour, or so, the horse's courage is subdued; and he is then considered by his captor a 'gentled' horse.

I have known, near Corpus Christi, a whole herd penned by some Mexicans, who retained only a dozen, or so, for their own use or for sale,* and having shaved the mane and tail-hair from the mares and horses, released them, to increase and multiply. The mane and tail-hair thus secured is worked up into bridle-reins and cabrestos. The mane-hair, being softer, is reserved for girths, and it is the best material for that purpose I have ever used, for, in the hottest weather, it never galls a horse.

The Texan settlers are very fond of cutting off the foals from the mares. These young horses and mares are brought up by hand, and become as intelligent as dogs, and make the most docile horses in the world for hunting, or for ladies.

This mode of horse-rearing somewhat resembles that of the Arabs; and as the eastern and western horses are of the same stock, the method seems to succeed equally well with both. When a hunter desires to cut off a foal from its mother, it is only necessary for him to get as near the herd as possible, as in the case of lassoing, and then to run between the mare and her foal. As soon as he has succeeded in doing this, he gently bears

* Very young, if horses; three or four years old, if mares.

away from the mother, who, frightened and confused, stays with the herd. Then, as he bears away, in like manner, from the other horses till they are out of sight, the foal, which he has been cutting off, will confidingly stay with his steed and follow it home.

When I first went to Texas horse-flesh was very cheap, and I have known Mexicans who would lasso a wild horse for you for a dollar (four shillings and twopence), and 'gentle' it for you for another. In those days it was a common remark, that horse-flesh was cheaper than shoe-leather: but horses have since gone up much in price; they now sell for from ten dollars to a hundred. Some of the horse raisers in Mexico own immense herds; and it is related of a very rich old lady, who sent her son to Spain to be educated, where he afterwards entered the army, that when he returned to his native land as colonel of his regiment, she sent him, from her *hacienda*, in the interior of Mexico, to Vera Cruz—the port at which her son and his men disembarked—a thousand white horses, as a free mount for his men.

To many it may read rather like a story from the 'Arabian Nights,' that one person should possess a thousand white horses, but this will not appear singular when it is considered what an enormous quantity of horses some of the rich Mexicans own, and the pains which they take in keeping *manadas* (literally bunches) of the same colour together. A *manada* of mares

consists of twenty-five, and the breeder selects that number of black, white, grey, or bay mares, to put to a stallion of the proper colour for each *manada*. The stallion of each *bunch*, after being herded and penned with his mares for a day or two, gets used to them, and will allow no other horse to interfere with his harem. These little herds of horse and mares dot the vast prairies in all directions.

In the spring of the year, when the foals are dropped, those foals in each *manada* who differ in colour are marked in the herd-book, and when old enough to be weaned, are drafted into herds of young animals of their own colours, and finally are put into *manadas*, where all are alike.

It used to be an everyday practice for horse and mule-traders to bring in to Texas large herds of horses and mules to sell to the planters of that State; and I have often been present when the lasso was used in great perfection by the trader and his assistants. From one of these herds I have seen a planter select a dozen of these animals, and, one by one, they would be picked out and lassoed by the herdsman. This was the *modus operandi*: The planter would say, 'I'll take that grey mule.' The trader would point out the mule, and the herd would be put in motion till the mule ran between two men with lassoes. At a signal—a simple motion—both ropes would be whirled and thrown, one encircling the neck, the other the fore-legs. Down would fall the

mule, and at the same instant that it touched the ground, a third lasso would be entangled about its hind-legs. It would then be dragged into a pen, where it was safe. In this way a dozen would be secured, the money paid, and the trader would drive the rest to the next plantation.

In conclusion, I can only ask, why some of the best of the prairie mares—the best, of course, from a large pick—have never been imported to this country?

# CHAPTER V.

## THE COMMON AMERICAN DEER.

CERVUS VIRGINIANUS—CERVUS MEXICANUS.

*Characteristics.*—Steel-grey or red, according to the season. The fawns for the first six months after birth are spotted with white. All these spots are lost by the time it is one year old. Horns of a moderate size, curving forward, with from one to six points on each beam. Only palmated masses of malformation.

*Description.*—The head long and slender, with pointed muzzle; large black and lustrous eyes, with a very soft expression,—often compared by Western men to those of an Indian maiden; lachrymal cells, long and narrow, and partly concealed by a fold of skin; the legs are long and slender, and upon the inner side of the houghs are glandular pouches, concealed by a tuft of thick yellowish-red hairs; strongly odoriferous in the rutting or *running* season.

*Colour.*—Steel-grey in late autumn or winter; red in the spring; darker red or red-brown in the summer. The red or grey, according to the season, is uniform over the head, back, and sides of the deer; the chin, throat, belly, and insides of the thighs always white. The tail black above and white underneath; from being waved high when the animal is startled, it is technically known as 'the flag.'

*Weight.*—The bucks weigh from 100 lbs. to 150 lbs.: the does from 80 lbs. to 110 lbs.

Distributed everywhere through the Southern States.

TO the sportsman no animal, perhaps, presents more amusement than the red deer of America, being almost the only large animal which has not been driven far from the haunts of man by continued persecution and slaughter. Although constantly hunted by hounds, and shot at by the stalker, the beautiful animal flies from his foes only for a short time, soon returning again to its original haunts. The settlers live chiefly on his flesh, so that when the backwoodsman shoulders his long rifle and announces that he is going for *meat*, it may be taken for granted that he means to bring home that species of flesh which in England is called venison. Beef is beef all over the world (excepting, perhaps, amongst the horse-eating Parisians); hogs' flesh and bear flesh are denoted by their prefixes; but deer flesh is most decidedly and emphatically 'meat' in the South-western States of America, and is more frequently seen on the tables of all classes than any other kind of animal food. So that it follows that no wild animal of the American continent is more generally known or appreciated than the common red deer.

The American deer differs in some respects from that of Europe, the most striking distinction being in the antlers. In the Highlands of Scotland the horns of the red deer lean backwards from the brow, while the

tines project forward and downward. The beam of the American deer's horn is not so straight, being curved forward like a sickle, the 'points' rising from the hinder part of it in an upward direction.

The deer tribe is found entirely over the continent, and varies but little in its general appearance and size, although the experienced hunter can tell by looking at the carcase what kind of country the animal has inhabited. Deer which have ranged over a mountainous country never reach such fine condition as those which inhabit lower regions, where vegetation is more abundant and nutritious—those found in the swampy regions of Florida, Mississippi, and Texas, being the heaviest. As it seldom happens that the backwood hunters possess the means of weighing their deer when killed, somewhat exaggerated estimates have been given. The largest I ever saw weighed pulled down 157 lbs. Since then I have killed, and seen killed, specimens which I fancied more weighty, but, not having weighing conveniences, I was unable to verify my conjectures.

The American deer shed their horns annually. The usual period for this change is in the months of January, February, and March. The new horns begin to make their appearance very soon,—a soft pulpy mass rising from the spots whence the old horns have dropped, covered by a soft velvety substance. The development goes on rapidly, an increase of

growth being perceptible in a few hours. They are, of course, very soft and tender, and during this period the animal suffers much from the stings of insects and from contact with any hard substance, such as trees, rocks, or bushes.

As soon as the antlers are finally complete—about the end of June—they begin to harden rapidly. The sensitive nerves lose their vitality, the velvet is frayed off by friction against bushes, and the animal possesses a perfectly-formed, insensible weapon.

Not only to myself, but to other hunters it has been a mystery as to what becomes of the cast-off antlers of the deer. Although for many years I hunted in the forests of Texas, where the forests were well stocked with game, yet I very rarely found any. Far more frequently I came across some head and antlers, which in true hunter fashion had been severed from the animal and thrown into the fork of a tree. The only way in which I could account for this unusual circumstance was that sunshine and rain, together with constant contact with the earth, rendered them soft and friable, and that they were in that state devoured by the deer themselves, or by other wild cattle, for the sake of some saline particles which they might possess.

Another peculiarity of the deer is worthy of notice. About two inches above the hoofs, just where the cleft in the skin ends, there will be found a small hollow, partly filled with a waxy secretion of a yellow colour

and musky odour. The hunters say that it is this odour which the dogs smell, and which enables the hounds to follow the track of the deer with precision. In the feet of some of the old bucks the secretion is abundantly developed, though hunters say that it is inactive while the does have fawns by their sides and while the bucks are in the velvet; and that thus, as they leave no scent behind them, they do not so readily fall a prey to wolves, or to the hound of the hunter, while they are in a defenceless state.

The deer breed rapidly in Texas,—generally producing a couple of fawns, sometimes three. Now that the civil war is ended it would, perhaps, be well for the Acclimatisation Society to remember this fact. In Scrope's 'Days of Deer Stalking,' page 16, we find the following assertion:—'Neither Mr. John Crerer, who has followed deer in the forest of Athol for sixty years, nor any other individual there, has ever seen a hart cover a hind.' This is not the case in Texas. Few who have been on the prairies as hunters for a year or two but have seen the act repeatedly, and very instantaneous it is.

The young are generally produced about the month of March—later in more northern States. The doe conceals her young under a prostrate tree-top, or in the midst of some thick grass, visiting them occasionally during the day, especially during the morning, evening, and at night. The mother is much attached

to her offspring, and its bleat will bring her to its side if she is within hearing. Taking advantage of this natural affection, the Indian hunters imitate the fawn's cry with a pipe made of reed, and as soon as the unsuspecting mother approaches she falls a victim to their arrows.

The red deer of America is a gregarious animal, being found on the western prairies in scattered herds of thousands. It is only during the rutting season, however, that males and females are found together. When that has past, the bucks seem wearied with constant battles, and once more congregate peacefully with each other.

The localities which the deer selects as places of rest and concealment are varied, and in accordance with the nature of the country and climate. In the hilly regions of Virginia, deer have been seen lying on the ledge of a bare rock, without any attempt at concealment; but, more generally, they crouch either in clumps of myrtle or laurel-bushes, in fallen tree-tops or briar-patches, or in tall broom-grass (*Andropogon dissitiflorus*). In winter it seeks a sheltered situation, protected from the wind. In warm weather it resorts to shady swamps by the side of a brook, or rivulet.

Its food also varies at different periods of the year. In winter it feeds on the buds of various shrubs, such as the hawthorn and wild-rose, on brambles,

the winter-green (*Pyrola*), the partridge-berry (*Mitchella repens*), the deer-leaf (*Hopea tinctoria*), bush honey-suckle (*Azalea*), and others. In spring and summer it brouses on tender grasses, and near plantations it commits great damage amongst the crops of green corn, and is very fond of peas. In the autumn the woods furnish it with abundant food, in the shape of chestnuts, acorns, and beechmast, which it shares with wild turkeys and other denizens of the forest. And when the frosts of winter have ripened the fruit of the Persimmon-tree, that becomes a favourite food of the deer.

Deer cannot exist long without water, being obliged to visit some spring, or river, nightly for the purpose of drinking. They are very fond of salt, and, like many other animals, resort instinctively to saline springs, or 'salt-licks,' as they are called; and thither, too, the hunters go, and numbers of the animals are killed.

The timidity of the deer is equal to its swiftness, and the hunter seldom experiences any danger, even from a wounded buck, although a few instances have been known of their attacking man. The bucks fight furiously amongst themselves during the rutting season; for although the animal has no gall, there is a great deal of 'bitterness' in his composition when the mastery over a herd of does is at stake, and the woodland glades have to witness

many a desperate encounter. These battles sometimes last half-a-day, till both combatants fall upon the turf exhausted, only to renew the frantic strife when they have recovered their wind. More than once it has happened that the antlers of the rivals have become firmly locked together, and both have thus miserably perished of starvation.

The usual pace of the deer is walking, unless very much alarmed. It pursues its course silently, with head carried low, occasionally moving its ears and tail. The largest and oldest doe is usually the leader of the herd, which moves forward in Indian file. When anything occurs to startle it, the deer gives a few sharp snorts or whistles, while the head is turned in every direction to discover the cause of alarm. When the deer is roused from its bed, it bolts off with a rush, running very low,—with head and tail in a line with the body,—at a speed which, for a few hundred yards, is quite equal to that of a thorough-bred horse; but it is unable to sustain such exertion for any length of time.

It is not a long-lived animal—generally showing symptoms of age and decay when ten years have been reached. But if it does not attain a great age, it is remarkably tenacious of life while in its prime. Yet, perhaps, it forms no exception to the general rule, that all animals in rude health, and possessing a high organisation, 'die hard.'

Several instances of this tenacity of life are on record, one of which I can certify.

On one occasion I was a member of a hunting party in the thick forests which extend over nearly all Brazos country, when a friend, Col. A——, shot a deer from his saddle. At that moment I was on the ground, busily employed in dressing a deer I had killed, and arranging it for transport behind my saddle; and as my hands and knife were bloody, and the Colonel was close by me when he shot at the deer, I volunteered to go and gralloch his deer for him, if he would undertake to bring on my rifle and horse when I had strapped the venison on the saddle. Upon reaching the spot where Colonel A—— had told me the deer was standing when he fired, I was unable to see it. It was very evident that he had not dropped it dead in its tracks; but upon looking at those tracks I could see splashes of blood, and, forcing my way through the tall weeds, I soon became covered with blood, which seemed to have poured in streams from each side of the animal. After following the bloody trail of the animal for about one hundred and eighty yards, I found it dead. On examination, it appeared that the bullet had entered just behind the left shoulder, had passed right through the body, *severely wounding the heart in its passage*, and had finally issued just behind the right shoulder. I showed the wounded

heart to my friend, Colonel A——, who merely remarked:—

'Ah! the beast ran as long as it could hold its breath, but dropped the moment it respired. They often do so.'

A most extraordinary case is reported by a physician of Virginia. He was very fond of the chase, and had one morning the good fortune to kill a buck in capital condition. On opening the animal he made the wonderful discovery, that at some time during the animal's life—evidently a long time back—its heart had been transfixed by an elder-stalk which was still embedded in it. The wounds had entirely healed without any trace of inflammation or disease in the substances through which the stalk had penetrated.

If a deer has one of its hind legs broken it is still enabled to proceed, with great swiftness, on the remaining three; and more than once they have escaped me even when mounted and on the open prairie,—the long grass and broken hog-wallow ground being much more in their favour than in mine.

The methods most commonly employed to capture deer are stalking or 'still-hunting,' as the hunters of the Southern States call it—driving with hounds while the hunters take up posts where they think the animal will pass; 'jumping' or 'bouncing' deer; together with the cowardly, unfair, and dangerous practice of fire-hunting. That which will be most to the taste of those

who love fair sport is still-hunting, although a great deal of practice is requisite before much success can be looked for. The keen eyes of the still-hunter should scrutinise every sign, however minute or trifling; he should mark where the dew has been swept from the weeds and bushes; should note broken twigs where the deer in passing has nipped the tender bud, and the sharply outlined hoof-tracks in the soft ground. Crushed and trampled-down grass, and moss chipped from the trunk of a fallen tree, should be examined with the greatest attention; and he whose quick eye soonest detects these signs, and whose knowledge of the habits of the animal enable him to interpret them aright, will always be the best hunter.

The dress of the still-hunter should be in sympathy with the general tint of the forests in which he seeks his game. In spring, when the trees put forth their young and delicate leaves, green will be the most suitable colour; but in autumn, when the foliage changes its hue, and withered leaves are plentifully scattered amongst the brown trunks, he must assume a vesture of greyish-brown. Thus attired, and with the exercise of a proper caution, the hunter may move amongst the dead tree-stumps and rotting logs without attracting the attention of the quick-eared game.

He should move slowly and silently as a shadow; his eyes should be everywhere; he should avoid treading on a dry stick, as its slightest snapping would betray him

and alarm the game; he should go against the wind as an invariable rule. But though attention to all this may contribute towards success, more is required to make a successful hunter. It is necessary to know much of the habits of the birds or animals he pursues, as well as the manner in which certain conditions of weather influence them. In deer-hunting, the phases of the moon must be studied with attention, for this reason: when the moon is full, or nearly so, the deer feed by its light, rising when it rises and couching when it sets, hiding closely all day in the deepest and most tangled thickets, so that the hunter will scarcely find out except by accident. On the other hand, at times when the moon does not rise till morning, and shines, though perhaps not visibly, during the day, then the prairies and open glades are alive with deer, and the hunter may count them by hundreds where only a few days before he failed to find one.

Although the deer is a large animal, yet the colour of his skin harmonizes so well with the foliage and other objects by which he is surrounded, that it requires a very practised eye to detect him readily. When first I wandered in pursuit of deer in the American wilderness, I was told that the first thing I should see of the deer would be his tail, or 'flag,' as it is called, waving in the air as he bounded off. Being a young man and a fair shot, of course I did not believe

this, but imagined that my eyes were as good as my neighbours'; but, before I had hunted long, I discovered that it was just as I had been told. I was not quite so sharp-sighted as I fancied myself, and it was many a long day before I was able to discover the deer before they detected my presence.

However, after a good deal of practice, with much patience, together with valuable hints from old and experienced hunters, with whom I frequently associated in a day's ramble through the woods, or joined in camp hunts, extending sometimes over two or three weeks, a month, or even longer, I gained much more experience and knowledge of hunter-craft than I had the least idea was necessary, when I first took up that line of business.

Long before the pale-face, with his deadly rifle, intruded on the Indian hunting grounds, the capture of the common deer exercised all the ingenuity and patience of the red-skin warrior. From the number of flint arrow-heads turned up by the plough, where the land has been cultivated, it is pretty evident that the bow was in general use throughout the North American continent. A gentleman who travelled in Florida, informs us that the Indians in that region seldom shot at a deer beyond twenty-five or thirty yards distance, exercising great caution before they ventured to discharge their arrows. The result, however, was generally favourable to the hunter.

Deer-stalking on the open prairie, when the grass is long, or there are plenty of long weeds, or high mounds, is perhaps less difficult than chasing the game in the forest. The hunter being mounted on a well-trained horse, can command an extended view of the surrounding space, and, after securing his horse, take advantage of the wind and every other favourable circumstance to approach the herd. It frequently happens that a friendly gully lends its aid to shelter the hunter, and under the screen of its banks he can approach close enough to deliver the contents of both barrels of even a shot-gun. In places where the grass is not so tall, or where the vegetation is only just beginning to make its appearance after a prairie fire, or when the prairie is perfectly level, the tact, skill, and patience of the hunter must be exerted in order to insure success.

During the period of my life which I passed as hunter for a plantation, and afterwards as independent hunter, supplying some rising young town with game, I often had occasion to put in practice all hints and instructions received from my preceptors in the art of venery, and frequently to invent new dodges to circumvent the game where it had been much hunted and disturbed by thoughtless boys and ignorant greenhorns. Let us imagine such a case.

The prairie hunter is in search of 'meat' during a time when the nights are dark, without the slightest appearance of a moon; and he disdains to practise the

assassination sport of fire-hunting. He has been over a very likely feeding place, where high grass waves in plenty, and where there are many scattered ponds. Such a region might well tempt the deer to linger, and yet to his surprise not a head of game is to be seen; though from the darkness of the nights he knows well enough that they ought to be feeding. The hunter, after puzzling his head for some time to discover the reason of this, suddenly remembers that, about three weeks back, he saw the smoke of a prairie fire a few miles off; and he recollects, too, that this fire was very soon extinguished by the violent rain of a real Texan thunderstorm. He at once understands the reason why no deer are to be found, and, without wasting any more time, turns his horse's head towards the scene of the fire.

That his surmise is correct, he learns as soon as he arrives at the outskirts of the long grass where the progress of the fire was arrested. Before him stretches a level plain, several miles in extent, on which there is a crop of short yellow tinted grass, somewhat resembling a field of young wheat; but so rapid has been the growth of this new vegetation, that it has not yet attained its proper emerald hue. Scattered about this wide expanse are deer in groups of from half-a-dozen to twenty, eagerly devouring the rich young grass.

'Yes,' a looker-on might well remark, 'there are plenty of deer, and fine animals they appear to be; but the nearest herd is at least twelve hundred yards

from you; the intervening space is as level as a bowling alley; so pray how do you mean to get at them?'

A good hunter would reply, 'In spite of all you say, my friend, I mean to have the best deer from one of the nearest herds. In the first place the wind blows from them towards us, as it should do; secondly, although to your unpractised eye the surface of the prairie appears perfectly level, it is not so in reality; there are many slight hollows and inequalities, quite deep enough to shelter me from observation when I am lying flat upon the surface; and in the third place, I fancy it will not be necessary to travel all that distance, inasmuch as I hope to persuade some of the deer to come half-way to meet me. So, my friend, if you will take charge of our steeds, keeping them and yourself as quiet and motionless as possible, I will show you a dodge which may perhaps prove very useful to you at other times.'

The hunter would begin by creeping out very silently into the open prairie in a stooping position, as low down as he possibly can bend. All the while he must keep a most careful watch upon the deer before him, and as soon as he sees one of the animals twitch its white tail in a nervous manner, must fall flat upon the ground, for that waving of the flag is only the preliminary movement to a careful survey all round. As soon as the deer is quietly feeding once more, the hunter will continue his onward movement, crawling forward this time, and so gradually working his way

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till he has covered half the distance between the edge of the long grass and the spot where the deer are feeding. He must then take advantage of any little hollow which he considers suited to his purpose, and lay himself flat on his stomach, and after arranging a forked stick to serve as a rest for the muzzle of his rifle, he will wait quietly and motionless until some of the deer happen to turn their heads towards him.

At such times it generally happens that the old does are the watchers over the safety of the herd, and they have quite as much curiosity as is exhibited by the female sex in other species of animals.

As soon as the hunter perceives that one of the animals is looking in his direction, he will raise his hand into the air and work the fingers very rapidly, until the gaze of the doe is attracted towards him, when he will immediately lower it, and remain motionless. The continued stare of the old lady, who has witnessed what is, to her, a most extraordinary phenomenon on the prairie, will be certain to attract the gaze of one or two of her immediate neighbours; and as soon as half-a-dozen are straining their eyes to see the singular appearance which so excited their companion's curiosity, the hunter will repeat his manœuvres. As many of the animals as have seen this unwonted sight will be certain to advance towards it, and their combined motion will attract the attention of others, who will join the inquisitive party.

A third time the cunning deer-stalker will repeat the action which is so inexplicable to the animals, thus raising their curiosity to an unconquerable height. Poor simple beasts! The result of this is, that one of the number pays for the curiosity of the herd; for as soon as they have advanced to within range of the deadly rifle, the quick eye of the hunter singles out the finest animal in the herd, the barrel of the piece is glanced along, a light cloud of white smoke puffs out into the clear air, while the sharp crack of the rifle is followed by a dull heavy thump, as the bullet buries itself in the carcase of a fine fat buck.

The stricken animal bounds high up into the air and falls lifeless upon the turf, while the others, warned by his fate, depart at a rapid rate, and are soon far beyond the reach of rifle-bullet.

The poets—Shakspeare in particular—have expressed much sorrow for the sufferings of wounded deer, asserting that the animal sheds tears when injured or distressed. This idea was most probably suggested by a superficial examination of the deer's face; for there is in fact an indentation under the corner of the eye peculiar to this animal, and this, being of a dark colour, as if caused by continual drops of water, no doubt gave rise to the idea. I do not think there is any reasonable authority for saying that the deer shed tears; but from the fact that, upon dissection, these depressions are found to extend up into the jaw-bones, it is not

improbable that they may be vents to aid and add to respiration.

Driving deer is much more merry and sociable sport than the more scientific still-hunting. It requires less skill on the part of those engaged in the chase; though, if indulged in frequently, it ruins the woods for stalking. The loud noise of the dogs so alarms the deer that they will frequently betake themselves to another and more quiet range of country.

The best time for this kind of sport is in the autumn, when the woods have begun to change their tints; a chemical process has been going on amongst those leaves since the cool nights commenced; the suspended circulation has given a scarlet hue to the foliage of the maple and sweet gum trees, the hickory leaves are yellow, and others exhibit almost every conceivable tint. The deer are then in good order; the air is more cool than during the summer months, and there are no drawbacks to the enjoyment.

The hunters sally forth, mounted on good horses which will not wince under fire, so that their riders can use the rifle effectively from the saddle. The party consists of, say, half-a-dozen Southern settlers, all jolly companions and keen hunters; so that it is quite an act of self-denial to refuse to join them. While jogging along towards that part of the woods which you intend to drive, many a good anecdote or exciting tale will be told, laughs and jokes will pass about, freely mingled

with speculations as to the quantity and quality of game which the day's sport will produce.

One of the hunters who best knows the ground volunteers to act as 'driver,' for that requires a knowledge of the game haunts, and of the points at which the deer enter the drive; the remainder of the party hurry off to various stands which the deer are likely to pass when roused from their lairs. Some, whose steeds are restive, dismount as soon as they reach their stands, and tie up their horses out of sight, while others very calmly remain in the saddle. The latter have the best chance of killing game, as they are ready to gallop in any direction when the quarry is running before the hounds; being in this guided by their knowledge of the woods and the cry of the hounds.

During the interval—generally a short one in Texas—which elapses before the game is started by the dogs, each man carefully examines his weapon—rifle or shot-gun, as the case may be. If the hunter be armed with the latter, each barrel carries a dozen buck-shot, 'blue whistlers' they are termed; if a rifle, a single bullet well aimed is sufficient to roll over the stoutest buck in his tracks.

A good acquaintance with the country, and the points where the deer are most likely to pass, does not constitute the only information which the hunter should possess, although an ordinary hunter can often kill deer, guided by such scanty knowledge alone. There are many

other little matters which will often materially assist him in his sport. For instance, deer very frequently run in a circle, like hares, and that circle is in nine cases out of ten made from right to left—left shoulders forward, as military men say; so that if the deer should bound past the spot which the hunter has selected, without giving a chance for a shot, he may yet gallop forward and intercept the game at some other point.

It should be recollected, also, that in ascending hilly ground deer never choose a direct route unless very hardly pressed; on the contrary, they wind round and round after the fashion of a country turnpike road, ascending gradually in a circuitous route; so that if a winding trail exists leading to high ground the deer will be almost certain to follow it. In descending they follow the same rule, unless when closely pursued by man or hound.

Such was the abundance of game in Texas that there was rarely any occasion for galloping about. There were generally several deer moving at the same time, and by remaining at one well-chosen path I seldom failed to get a shot. On one occasion, when I was in the woods with a friend, an old negro acting as driver, we had no less than twenty-seven shots at deer in the short space of three hours. Two years afterwards, however, I paid a visit to the same woods, and hunted a whole morning without success; the forest had been so thoroughly harried by men and dogs, that the

frightened deer had betaken themselves to a less noisy district.

It is rather an exciting moment, even for men who have killed dozens of deer, when, after standing about listlessly for some time, the dogs begin to give tongue. In a moment the hunter feels filled with new life; he listens with the greatest attention to the slightest sound. The full cry of the hounds, though faint at first, grows more and more distinct and musical, as it comes nearer and nearer. The eyes of the hunter are fixed upon the path by which he expects to meet the deer. If a dry stick snaps, the gun is instantly brought to his shoulder.

Presently there is a crushing sound amongst the bushes, and in another moment a fine buck comes plunging out into the open space. For a moment he stands with head erect, not knowing whither to turn, for the baying of the dogs proclaims foes behind him, while his keen nostrils have detected an enemy before. As he half turns himself, the rifle is brought to bear; there is a shot; the animal gathers up his body as though in pain, and makes one bound into the thicket. Up come the hounds, yelling like demons, and plunge into the covert where the deer lies dead. A loud twang upon the hunting-horn proclaims that one more lord of the forest will never tread the wilderness again.

Then, when the sun renders the chase too hot to be

pleasant, the hunters will assemble beneath the shade of a tree near a cool spring; pipes and cigars will be produced, the whisky flask will pass round, while the morning's sport, the weight of the game, as well as the short-comings of such as have been unsuccessful, will form the subject of discussion for a time—the doings of horses, dogs, and men, being thoroughly criticised. After a short rest, the slaughtered deer are placed upon the horses, and the refreshed hunters return to their homes.

The music of hounds and horn, cheerful companions, together with the agreeable sensation of having a good horse beneath you, all combine to render deer-driving a very pleasant and agreeable sport; so agreeable that I have always been pleased to join it, even though it involved a visit to some plantation forty or fifty miles distant from my humble wigwam. When, however, the sport was too near home, I was not so well pleased, because, as I have before said, it spoils the still-hunting, and I was often obliged to kill deer for business as well as for pleasure.

Amongst other method of capturing deer, may be mentioned a very objectionable one, which is practised only by a few men who are unworthy the name of hunters. Large steel traps are set in the waters of streams where the deer are in the habit of crossing. The animal, when thus captured, instead of tearing off its leg in violent efforts to escape, is said to remain

perfectly quiet. This method is quite as objectionable as the traps and wires, by means of which English poachers capture hares and rabbits.

When the weather is so warm as to render a tramp through the woods on foot impracticable, 'bouncing' or 'jumping' deer is good sport. I prefer it next to still-hunting, inasmuch as it does not disturb the deer very much. The months of June, July, and August are best fitted for this sport, because the nights are generally moonlight, so that the deer feed only between sunset and sunrise, lying close in the thickets during the day. The bucks are then in their best condition.

During these hot months the water holes on the open prairies are dried up by the fierce sun, and the bucks seek shelter from the heat, as well as from the attacks of millions of mosquitoes and gadflies, amongst the tall reeds and flags in swampy ground. While thus concealed, they lie so close together that the hunter is on them before he becomes aware of their presence; in fact, on more than one occasion, my horse has stumbled against their bodies before they have jumped. Sometimes they are found singly, sometimes two or three will spring up close together. On other occasions I have known ten or fifteen leap out of a very small thicket; and, more than once, I have tumbled over a pair of fine fat bucks right and left, as though they had been rabbits kicked out of a piece of rough grass in an English park or warren.

While pursuing this sport, I have often 'jumped' coyotes, or prairie wolves, instead of the buck I expected to find, and in such cases have never hesitated to destroy the 'varmint,' even though I might have the chance or the opportunity of killing a deer.

Fire-hunting is a cowardly, treacherous method of killing deer, and is resorted to by conscientious huntsmen only when game is exceedingly scarce, and, in consequence of having been over-hunted, too shy to approach during the day.

The fire-hunter carries upon his left shoulder a fire-pan, generally an old fryingpan, with a stout stick attached to the handle, in such a manner that the pan shall be about a yard behind the head of the hunter. This is filled with combustibles in the shape of balls made of cotton-seed and tar or pitch-pine knots. A comrade accompanies him with a well-trained dog, around the neck of which is a bell, the clapper of which is muffled with cotton or moss, so that it shall not alarm the deer. This dog is to track the deer if the hunter only wounds it, and then the cotton being removed, the bell indicates the direction which the dog has taken.

The most favourable weather is a dark, damp night after a rain, when the grass and dead leaves are so moist that they make no noise as the hunter treads on them. When they have reached that part of the prairie on which they intend to hunt, the contents of

the pan are ignited, and the deer, surprised to see such an illumination, spring from their lairs amongst the long grass, and gaze admiringly at the light, which makes their eyes shine like stars.

An experienced hunter can distinguish the eyes of a deer from those of other animals. In the first place, they are wider apart than those of most animals; secondly, they are of larger size; and thirdly, they are more brilliant. The eyes of a young colt are most like those of a deer, but not quite so bright. Bears and wolves keep their eyes constantly moving, while the deer gazes with great steadiness, seeming to be quite fascinated. The hunter advances with great caution, frequently to within a dozen yards of the eyes, when of course the poor victim is murdered. A hog's eyes have never been 'shone.'

If the hunter loses sight of the 'eyes' after they have been 'shined,' he knows that the animal has turned away, feeling alarmed, and fires immediately.

As a general rule, if the shot is at all successful, the victim falls at once, and is secured. If, however, the victim, though wounded, possesses strength to escape, the 'track-dog' is slipped, and the hunters follow him by the sound of the bell. If the hunters have no dog, they carefully mark the spot, and return at daybreak to trace their victim and secure the 'meat.'

But fire-hunting is a very dangerous sport, and is

prohibited by law in some of the Southern States, where it sometimes happens that cattle suffer instead of bucks or does. A gentleman in Louisiana once fired at a pair of eyes which he had shined, and discovered that he had killed his own horse, which he had tied to a tree while indulging in the sport. Another gentleman, while indulging in this questionable sport, saw a pair of eyes which he firmly believed to be those of a deer. Of course he fired, and had the pleasure of discovering, from the prolonged howl that followed his shot, that he had killed his own 'track-dog,' which had been held between the knees of a negro slave.

The most romantic legend of the backwoods connected with fire-hunting is one in which the celebrated Daniel Boone plays the hero. On one occasion, it is said, while fire-hunting, he 'shined' a pair of mild blue eyes, which seemed to him not to belong to the species of game he was in search of. He lowered his rifle and advanced, when, to his great surprise, he discovered a young girl, who seemed equally astonished at the adventure. The backwoods man, deeply grateful that he had not fired, accompanied the fair one to her father's hut hard by, and shortly afterwards she became the wife of the famous hunter.

The perfection of pleasure is, in my opinion, a camp hunt in the woods of Texas—a week or a

month in the wilds. The time is not too long to be tiresome, and many little luxuries can be carried out into the wilderness, to give additional enjoyment to the period of sport. The party should consist of from three to half-a-dozen good fellows who know each other, and whose hearts are in the sport. A couple of servants may be taken to perform all the little odd jobs about the camp, and to take charge of it during their absence. With regard to food, very little will be required but what the forests and prairies afford, and I should fancy there are few who would turn up their noses at venison the praises of which have been sung in all civilised lands, while it is no less appreciated by savages. Men learned in the art of cooking have propounded various theories with regard to the preparation of deer's flesh, but only on one point do they agree, namely, that it must be eaten hot. And they are right. What can be more delicate and tempting to the palate than the tender loin steaks of a fine fat buck snatched hot and hot from the glowing coals, and eaten while the rich juices burn the lips? Anyone who once tries this method of cooking will be ever afterwards wedded to it.

Suppose, then, that you have gone out into the forest, as before said, for a week's camp-hunt. Your camp should be upon the bank of some stream, where you are within easy reach of both prairie and

woodland. In such a situation you can, without very much exertion, hunt either deer or turkey, and, when satiated with that sport, can shoot small game to your pointers. I always prefer pointers in a hot climate, for their coats are shorter, and they need less water. The river, too, will afford some sport, should you feel inclined to fish: the water will be necessary for every living being in the camp, so that at night, after your day's sport, when grog and pipes are in full activity, you can safely say that it is the best spot for a hunting camp that could be selected. Songs and stories will amuse you: the most extravagant adventures are invented and told by the camp-fire, and many true adventures are sometimes related which seem quite as extraordinary as the extempore ones.

Sometimes, however, the Texan hunters are given to practical jokes: so be upon your guard. One of the best and most excusable, because the victim was much addicted to that insane species of wit, was played upon a friend of mine, who had exerted himself very much during the day, and feeling much fatigued, threw himself upon the ground, and fell asleep while his companions were eating a slight refreshment.

'What shall we do to him?' asked one, pointing towards the unconscious hunter.

All eyes were instantly directed towards the rival wit, who was known to nourish schemes of vengeance against the sleeping joker. The man immediately

drew a stout cord from his pocket, and, having tied one end of it to the sleeper's foot, fastened the other end to the collars of a couple of dogs, which were lying by. He then began to rouse the sleeper from his nap, by means of a succession of shakes and punches, and as soon as the visions of the slumberer were effectually dispelled, a glass of brandy and water was offered him, when, of course, he at once rose to his feet to take it.

At that moment, by a pre-concerted arrangement, the horns were blown, when immediately up sprang the two hounds attached to the cord, and down sat the victim of the practical joke in the bed of a rivulet, by the side of which he had been dreaming. The brandy and water was dashed into the stream, the gentleman's powder-flask was damped, and a great deal of damage done, but the rough joke had the desired effect, and the soaked hunter never afterwards played any tricks with his comrades.

The yarns related by the backwoodsmen are sometimes excessively ludicrous, and too improbable to bear sober repetition. To be effective, they must be told under the canopy of heaven, while a pile of huge blazing logs lights up the circle of sun-burnt bearded faces, as well as the gleaming ivories of Jumbo and Sambo, who, with Day and Martin polished skins, stand by grinning with delight at every joke, good, bad, or indifferent.

'Do you remember old Elkanah Gilkey?' asked a tall gaunt backwoodsman once on such an occasion.

'Can't say I do,' was the reply.

The backwoodsman then informed his hearers that Elkanah was a tall powerful man, upwards of six feet high, though, like most men who live constantly in the woods and on the prairies, he was very slow of speech. His rifle weighed exactly twenty-seven pounds, and carried a ball weighing an ounce; with this weapon he could bring down a deer at two hundred and fifty yards distance, and in the space of three years he had killed fifteen hundred deer for the sake of their skins. He could strip the animal of its natural covering in a few seconds, making a cut along the belly, and then forcing it off with his clenched fist inserted between the flesh and the skin. So well known was his skill that through all the country round he was known as 'the deer-hunter.'

'Well, as I said,' continued the backwoodsman, 'old Elk (we called him Elk for short) was, as I have said, one of the cleverest hunters in all Texas. You might bet high that he never went out for meat but what he got it; he made all his living out of the woods, he did. And that was a dog, that dog of his, True-tongue was.'

The hunter seemed lost in thought, for he became silent at the recollection of True-tongue.

'Well, what about the dog?' asked an impatient listener.

'Why, True-tongue was e'en about the best still-track-dog out. Old Elk said many a time, when he got "corned" a little, that he loved his dog better nor whisky; and that he *did* love, you may stake high.'

'Well, so do you, for that matter.'

The hunter little heeded the interruption, but continued his tale.

'Old Elk and his dog lived together, and used up a pretty lot of deer and varmint, till at last old True-tongue gave in. Elk was mortal vexed at that, and out of respect for his old comrade tanned the dog's hide, which he carried about for a long time, till one day, when he wanted a patch for his greasy old buckskin inexpressibles, and couldn't find anything else, why, he claps on a bit of old True-tongue's hide. Always after that old Elk found more deer than ever, for as soon as ever he came near one, or any kind of varmint, why, the patch would swell up, and strain and throb so much that it nearly burst the stitches!'

'You don't expect us to believe that?' cried all who heard the tale.

'Ah! I mean to serve old Rush like that when he dies,' responded the storyteller, 'perhaps he'll help me the same way.'

# CHAPTER VI.

## THE AMERICAN ANTELOPE, OR PRONG-HORN.

### ANTILOCAPRA AMERICANA—ANTILOPE FURCIFER.

*Description.*—The male antelope has short, black, flat, tapering horns, arching towards each other; the points are directed backwards; a small branch projects from each horn near the middle. The neck, back, and legs are of a yellowish brown; the belly and chest are white; the sides are reddish-white; three white bars or bands cross the throat; red hairs, tipped with black, form a kind of mane on the back of the neck extending from the occiput to the spring of the shoulders. A dark spot at the back of the cheek-bone exhales a strong odour. The tail is short; a large spot of pure white covers the rump.

The female is much smaller, has horns as well as the male, shaped in the same manner, but not nearly so large.

*Weight.*—As with the American deer, the weight varies considerably; but they weigh about one-third less than the deer.

THE true position of the antelope in the animal kingdom was for a long time a disputed question with naturalists, some being inclined to class it amongst the deer proper, while others contended that it ought to be ranked with the goats. In the case of the

American antelope, its generic name *Antilocapra* is expressive of a close relationship with the goat tribe.

The prong-horn, when fully grown, is as large as a sheep, but as it has longer legs, it appears larger. The hind legs are longer than the fore ones, a provision which not only considerably increases their speed but gives them material assistance in bounding up and down steep hills and rocky crags, over which these beautiful creatures scamper with the most wonderful dexterity and sureness of foot, as well as fleetness.

The prong-horn is found in nearly all the western territories of the United States, ranging as far upwards as the north branch of the Saskatchewan, where, however, they are merely summer visitors. The hunter who would view them in all their glory must leave the wooded valleys, and come away to the huge open prairie. Its favourite haunt of all seems to be the immense grassy plains that extend for hundreds of miles without a break in Oregon and Texas, where a sea of waving green is seen on every side, and the eye feels a relief when it at length rests upon one of those small isolated clumps of timber which, from their exact resemblance to closely wooded islands, are so named by the hunters.

The prong-horn wanders about sometimes alone, sometimes in groups of ten or twelve. It is very keen-sighted, as are all the inhabitants of the prairies, and has a very acute sense of smell. When a herd

of prong-horns first catch sight of the hunter, they do not appear to be in the least degree afraid of him, but pause in their rapid course to gaze upon the intruder, and stamp with their forefeet much like a flock of sheep when a strange dog enters their pasture. But if any movement should lead them to suppose that the stranger has unfriendly intentions towards them, they bound away at a speed which outstrips that of the greyhound.

The prong-horned antelope brings forth its young at about the same season as the common deer: that is, from the beginning of the month of May till the middle of June. It generally produces two fawns at a birth, sometimes only one; but I believe it has never been known to produce more than two. These fawns are not marked with spots like the young of the common deer, but are always of a uniform dun colour. Until they are some days old, the mother remains near them, feeding in the immediate vicinity of the spot on the short sweet grass of the prairies, but gradually extending the limit of her pasturage. So rapidly do the fawns grow in size and strength that, when a fortnight old, they are able to run by the side of the dam with quite sufficient speed to enable them to escape from wolves or any other four-footed foe, unless taken by surprise or while asleep.

If, as is sometimes the case, it should happen that the fawns are discovered and attacked by wolves before

they are strong enough to escape, the mother will fight in their defence with the utmost bravery, rushing on the foe at full speed and hurling them over, using her short horns, and sometimes throwing a wolf high into the air. The forefeet also come into play: with them she strikes such severe blows as frequently to put two or three wolves to flight. Should she succeed in driving them away, she will depart for some pasture where wolves are less numerous, or, with her young fawns, ascend some almost inaccessible hill-side.

In the month of September the rutting season begins, and continues for about six weeks. During this period the bucks fight fiercely, sometimes till death stops the combat. If the male chances to meet a rival, both immediately prepare for a duel; lowering their heads, they run at full speed at each other, their eyes flashing angrily. While striking at each other with their horns, they exhibit wonderful activity and rapidity in their movements, trying, like fencers, to get within each others 'guards,' and each using the recurved branches of his horns as a weapon.

Hunters for a long time supposed that the prong-horn, like the common deer, was in the habit of casting its horns every year. They are never seen without horns after they arrive at maturity, and further examination will prove that those ornamental and useful appendages are immovably attached to the skull.

The prong-horn has a large, lustrous, intelligent,

black eye full of a soft mild expression. The glandular opening beneath the eye so conspicuous in the ordinary American deer is not to be seen.

During spring and autumn the prong-horned antelope inhabits the richest valleys near some river; it can swim for some distance, and moves very swiftly through the water. Sometimes a herd, if startled while grazing on the banks of a river, will plunge boldly into the stream, and cross over without much disorder and apparently with the greatest ease.

Their keen eyes enable them to detect the motion of an enemy, be he a human foe or wolf. One of the herd is generally on the look-out, scanning the surface of the prairie, and will generally notice the approach of an enemy unless an intervening cluster of bushes or inequality of the ground chance to conceal it. Much caution is therefore necessary in stalking this animal. The hunter must advance against the wind, and move with patience as well as caution, only crawling forward a pace or two while the wary animals have their heads turned away from him in the act of browsing, or while they have their attention attracted by some other object. If alarmed, they will retire to the highest ground with which they are acquainted, and will not stray from them for some time.

The *Antilocapra* has some peculiarities in its gait. The moment they observe a man or any strange object which they suppose to be a foe, they *bound* for twenty

or thirty yards, raising everyone of their legs at the same instant to a height of a yard above the earth. They then stretch out their bodies, and make off at such speed that they will cover a space of three or four miles in as many minutes.

Man with his deadly gun is scarcely so formidable an enemy to the prong-horn as is the wolf. Cold weather is also a great means of checking the increase of this interesting tribe of animals. In the winter time numbers even of the adult animals perish from starvation on the more northern prairies; and the hunters frequently discover their carcases in the last stage of emaciation. In cold backward springs the young prong-horns are carried off in numbers by the inclemency of the season, while the wolves are always near at hand ready to devour any that are sick or ailing.

The prong-horn as well as deer are remarkably fond of salt or salt water, and know well where the salt-licks are to be found. If they possibly can, they pay a daily visit to the salt-spring, and after they have swallowed a quantity of the water, or have licked the salt earth, they will remain near the spot for two or three hours, in fact refusing to stir till hunger drives them once more to their feeding grounds.

The prong-horn is fatter and in better condition late in the autumn than at any other period of the year. In the opinion of most hunters, the choicest morsel is

the liver; and it is said that hundreds of them are killed for the sake of that delicacy only.

The spirit of inquisitiveness so noticeable in the deer exists in perhaps a greater proportion in the *Antilocapra*. Both white and Indian hunters take advantage of this to entice the wild and suspicious creature within shot of their bows or rifles, by lying flat and kicking up their heels in the air, or by hoisting a piece of rag on the end of a ramrod.

An extract from Mayne Reid's celebrated novel, 'The Scalp Hunters,' will show some of the difficulties attending antelope-hunting.

'On the third day after leaving the caravan, as we were riding near the Cunmaron, I thought I observed a pronged head disappear behind a swell in the prairie. My companions were sceptical, and none of them would go with me; so, wheeling out of the trail, I started alone. One of the men, for Godé was behind, kept charge of my dog, as I did not choose to bring him with me lest he might alarm the antelopes. My horse was fresh and willing, and, whether successful or not, I knew I could easily overtake the party by camping time.

'I struck directly towards the spot where I had seen the object. It appeared to be only half-a-mile or so from the trail. It proved to be more distant—a common illusion in the crystal atmosphere of these upland regions.

'A curiously formed ridge, a *couteau des prairies* on a small scale, traversed the plain from east to west. A thicket of cactus covered part of its summit. Towards this thicket I directed myself.

'I dismounted at the bottom of the slope, and leading my horse silently up among the cacti plants, tied him to one of their branches. I then crept cautiously through the bushes towards the point where I fancied I had seen the game. To my joy, not one antelope, but a brace of those beautiful animals, was grazing beyond; but, alas! too far off for the range of my rifle. They were fully three hundred yards distant upon a smooth grassy slope. There was not even a sage bush to cover me should I attempt to approach them. What was to be done?

'I lay for several minutes thinking over the different tricks known in huntercraft for taking the antelope. Should I imitate their call? Should I hoist my handkerchief and try to lure them up? I saw that they were too shy; for, at short intervals, they threw up their graceful heads and looked enquiringly around them. I remembered the red blanket upon my saddle. I would display this upon the cactus bushes; perhaps it would attract them.

'I had no alternative, but was turning to go back for the blanket, when all at once my eye rested upon a clay-coloured line running across the prairie beyond where the animals were feeding. It was a break in the

surface of the plain, a buffalo road, or the channel of an arroyo; in either case the very cover I wanted, for the animals were not a hundred yards from it, and were getting nearer to it as they fed.

'Creeping back out of the thicket, I ran along the side of the slope towards a point where I had noticed that the ridge was depressed to the prairie level. Here to my surprise I found myself on the banks of a broad arroyo, whose waters, clear and shallow, ran slowly over a bed of sand and gypsum.

'The banks were low, not over three feet above the surface of the water except where the ridge infringed upon the stream. Here there was a high bluff; and, hurrying round its base, I entered the channel, and commenced wading upwards.

'As I had anticipated, I soon came to a bend where the stream, after running parallel to the ridge, swept round and cañoned through it. At this place I stopped and looked cautiously over the bank. The antelopes had approached within less than rifle range of the arroyo; but they were yet far above my position. They were still quietly feeding and unconscious of danger. I again bent down and waded on.

'It was a difficult task proceeding in this way. The bed of the creek was soft and yielding, and I was compelled to tread slowly and silently lest I should alarm the game; but I was cheered in my exertions by the prospect of fresh venison for supper.

'After a weary drag through several hundred yards, I came opposite to a clump of wormwood bushes growing out of the bank. "I may be high enough," thought I; "these will serve for cover."

'I raised my body gradually till I could see right through the leaves. I was in the right spot.

'I brought my rifle to a level, sighted for the heart of the buck, and fired. The animal leaped from the ground and fell back lifeless.

'I was about to rush forward and secure my prize when I observed the doe, instead of running off, as I expected, go up to her fallen partner, and press her tapering nose to his body. She was not more than twenty yards from me, and I could plainly see that her look was one of enquiry and bewilderment. All at once she seemed to comprehend the fatal truth, and, throwing back her head, commenced uttering the most piteous cries, at the same time running in circles around the body. I stood wavering between two minds. My first impulse had been to reload and kill the doe; but her plaintive voice entered my heart, disarming me of all hostile intentions. Had I dreamt of witnessing this painful spectacle, I should not have left the trail. But the mischief was now done. "I have worse than killed her," thought I; "it will be better to despatch her at once."

'Actuated by these principles of common, but to her fatal, humanity, I rested the but of my rifle and re-

loaded. With a faltering hand I again levelled the piece and fired.

'My nerves were steady enough to do the work. When the smoke floated aside, I could see the little creature bleeding on the grass, her head resting against the body of her murdered mate.'

Nemesis was near at hand in the shape of a quick-sand, which swallowed the gallant captain's boots, and very nearly put an end to the career of the hunting novelist. How he was rescued from his unpleasant situation is to be found in the book from which I have already quoted.

In the Upper Missouri regions the prong-horned antelopes are frequently killed by the Indians while swimming across the stream. The red-skin hunters say that it shows a marked preference for the northern bank of the river: this they attribute to the prevalence on that side of certain shrubs and plants of which they are particularly fond.

The antelope preserves all its shyness in captivity; they are seldom thoroughly tamed, although a gentleman residing at St. Louis, Missouri, had one, a female, which, having been caught very young on the prairies, grew up excessively tame and gentle in its manners, following its master to every part of the house, even to the roof of the building. The gentle creature was unfortunately left one day in the company of a buck elk, which gored it to death, to the great grief of the owner.

The prong-horn has a very peculiar cry, somewhat resembling a prolonged whistle, and very different from the loud snorting of the common deer. To attempt to convey an idea of this cry by any combination of letters would be useless; but so strange and wild is it, that once heard it will not readily be forgotten.

Indians are said to capture the prong-horns much as they capture the buffalo; that is, by surrounding a herd and driving them over a precipice into the ravine. In more northern districts the hunters put on snow-shoes, and pursue them on foot when the snow has a depth of ten or twelve inches. The animal's long, slender legs sink through to the ground, and his speed is checked, while the hunter makes his way along without difficulty.

Notwithstanding the trouble and fatigue attending the sport, there are many men who will journey for miles out on the prairies, and think themselves well repaid if they can boast of having killed a couple of prong-horns.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE AMERICAN HARE—LEPUS AMERICANUS.

### THE GREAT PRAIRIE HARE OR JACKASS RABBIT—LEPUS TEXIANUS.

*Description.*—Head short; nose blunt; eyes prominent; ears far back and very near each other; whiskers long and thick; body long and clothed with long hair, beneath which is a soft downy fur; the hind-legs are nearly twice the length of the fore-legs; the feet thickly clothed with hair, so that the impression of the claws is not generally visible even when passing over snowy ground; the tail short and covered with fur. In summer the fur on its body is an inch and a-half long; in winter, perhaps half an inch longer.

*Colour.*—In summer the whole of the upper part of the body is of a reddish-brown; the hairs are at their roots of a bluish ash-tint; then comes a yellowish-red, and the part next the tips reddish-brown; nearly all the hairs are tipped with black—this colour predominates towards the rump; the whiskers black; ears brown with narrow black border towards outer edge; the pupil of the eye dark; the iris light yellow; the nose, chin, and throat are white; the under surface of the body and inner surface of legs, white; tail brown above, white beneath. In the Northern States it becomes nearly purely white in winter.

*Size.*—The American hare varies much in size. The following dimensions are the average: Length from point of nose to end of tail, twenty-one inches; length of ear, three

and a-half inches; from heel to end of middle toe five inches and-a-half. The full-grown animal will average in weight from five to six pounds; in the depth of winter a trifle less.

THE *Lepus Americanus*, so well-known under the name of rabbit, is common to most parts of North America, although it has been confounded with one or two other species. It is found as far north as the sixty-eighth parallel of latitude.

The hunter who kills one of these animals must not expect to find quite so savoury an animal as the European hare. Its flesh is rather dry, and not superior to that of the common English rabbit; but some sportsmen are epicurean in their fancies, and may pronounce it delicious for the sake of its novelty.

Like the generality of its species, the American hare seeks its food during the night, or late in the evening, or early in the morning. Sometimes, during the spring and summer months, it may be observed as the sun is rising or declining in the afternoon, cautiously proceeding by some well-known route through the woods. Groups of two or three are sometimes found sporting together. If they are disturbed on such occasions, they will sit upon their hind-legs and drum upon the ground with their fore-paws, in the manner so common to most hares and rabbits. This noise, thus produced, can be heard at some yards' distance. If the intruder who causes all this disturbance continues his movements, they will all hop into the bushes, and there sit erect on

their hind-legs, with ears in listening attitude, as though trying to ascertain whether they have been deceived, or whether man really has designs against the lives of any of the family. In this position they are good rifle practice.

This sound is supposed to indicate a note of warning as well as anger, and is very common amongst the males when they meet in desperate combat for the good graces of the female. When the hare has finished feeding, it retires to its form in the thick foliage of a fallen tree, or in some long grass, as the English hares do, or amongst the crevices of the rocks, if the country is hilly.

Nature, which is ever bountiful to all her creatures, has been especially so to the hare, whether it is the English or American breed. Its ears are so constructed as to catch the most remote sounds, and give warning of distant danger; but it can only hear imperfectly sounds proceeding from before it, its ears having much more sensibility to sounds which have their origin behind. To this, in many cases, it owes its safety—its fleetness of foot being only a secondary consideration. But, in order to convey it clear from all danger, its legs are of the most muscular mould, especially the hind ones, which have nearly double the length of the fore ones. This length in the hind-legs gives the hare a great superiority in locomotion, especially in ascending a hilly country; and the hare of America, like its

English kinsman, being well aware of this fact, invariably makes towards rising ground when disturbed or chased.

It is a common opinion that the hare is unable to see directly before her. Anyone who will take particular notice of a hare's eyes, will observe that they are so situated as to enable the animal to command a view of nearly a whole circle, and that, too, without moving its head. These eyes are always open, whether sleeping or waking: in fact, they are so protuberant that the lids are not large enough to cover them. The nostrils are frequently moved during sleep, and the eye-lids seem to wink; yet, although its eyes are so formed as to enable it to discover impending danger in any quarter, the hare is often seen running towards the very dogs from which she wishes to escape.

In summer time the hare closely resembles the bushes and various kinds of ground on which it makes its form; and this circumstance, no doubt, enables it to avoid many enemies. The hunter must not expect from this assertion to find *green* hares running about on *green* prairies; the table-lands of the West sometimes exhibit a lack of verdure which would scarcely be credited, as the grass is scorched brown by the sun. Poetical ideas of prairie-land fade away when the traveller approaches the great plains to the north of Texas, on the borders of the Upper Missouri, or the Yellowstone rivers. Instead of green pastures,—only awaiting

the arrival of flocks and herds with their attendant shepherds,—he will be in a waste of barren, stony soil, where he will be tormented with thirst, eaten up by all kinds of flies and mosquitoes, and, unless he takes wood, and food, and water with him, he will be lucky not to have to go to bed fireless and supperless. The Indians, too, whom the novice in prairie-life will expect to find all grace, elegance, and chivalry, will turn out to be a filthy horde of savages, wrapped in vermin-eaten buffalo-skins, their repulsive faces daubed with various coloured earths or ores. These miserable tramps will most probably extract from the inexperienced traveller a far greater portion of his stores than he can well spare; or, should he refuse to comply with their inordinate requests, will very probably send an arrow through his body, rob him of his gun, ammunition, knife, and other valuables, and leave his body to the mercy of wolves and vultures.

But to return to our hares. The period of gestation is about six weeks, and the females bring forth their young during the month of May, hiding them away in crevices of rocks, in the roots of hollow trees, or in dense bushes, forming for them a nest of grass, dried leaves, and fur plucked from their bodies. Some hunters assert,—I know not with how much truth,—that the American hare brings forth its young twice in a year. Certain it is that young hares, not more than four or five days old, have been seen in the Southern

States late in the month of July. The question then arises, were these the second litter of an old hare, or the offspring of one of the last year's females?

In ten or twelve days after birth, the young hares leave their nests, and, after that time, they derive very little help, protection, or sustenance from the old one. The young are able to see when born, and are covered with fur of a somewhat darker hue than the coat of the old ones. As they grow older, however, they assume a lighter tint.

The English rabbit and hare are often found to possess certain cannibal propensities, which lead them to destroy their own offspring. So far as I have observed, or can learn, this has not been noticed in the American hare, which seems to watch the frolics of its young family with much sober joy and attention, sometimes even entering into the sport itself with the youngsters, as a cat will romp with her kittens.

The American hare exhibits a decided preference for dry elevated situations, such as high grounds where pine and fir-trees are abundant. This may be because the hue of the soil, covered as it is with the fallen foliage, together with the trunks and the rough earth, assimilate so much with the animal in colour that it will scarcely be noticed, save by the keen eyes of an Indian or an eagle.*

* The hare, the world over, is more frequently found by the sparkle of its eye than by its body being detected.

In winter, however, they frequent only a single path leading from their usual haunt to the feeding grounds; seeking for refuge in some very sheltered nook, which it leaves only when pressed by hunger. In this respect the American hare much resembles its English namesake, which will make a regular foot-path through a field of standing corn. The Indians are as expert in the practice of setting snares for them as any poachers can be.

In those parts of America where the hand of man has felled the forest and cultivated the plain, hares, from an instinctive dread of snares, seldom approach the fields of the farmer.

The hare is not known to *burrow* in the earth, although it sometimes has its domicile in the crevices of rocks. It has been chased with dogs for hours without going to earth. Its long legs are a security against the pursuit of anything but a greyhound. Like the English hare, it will wind and double amongst the bushes in the most tortuous manner, and in such a style as to throw the dogs entirely off its track. Unless the hunter appears upon the scene, and with his gun stops its progress, the nimble animal, which is quite as long-legged as its British namesake, is sure to escape.

In the Northern States, where it changes its coat to a dull white in the winter months, some thoughtless hunters, who are not compelled to depend on their

success in hunting for a living, chase the hare with dogs. The animal is then in its poorest condition, and bounds away so lightly on its broad furry feet, that it escapes with the greatest ease; while the heavy dogs flounder in the snow up to their bellies at every step till, finding the pursuit hopeless, they wisely return to their foolish masters. The habitual timidity of the hare, and its constant apprehension of danger, may go far to preserve it in that state of leanness in which it is best able to profit by its speed. The hare never walks but jumps, and, according to Buffon, is the only member of the animal kingdom which has hair inside its lips. Although the *breast* of the hare is narrow, the chest is very capacious and well-fitted to give free play to the lungs, which are in a continual state of violent expansion while the animal is flying from its foes. The frequent inspiration and expiration thus caused, make a much larger space requisite for their free action than is assigned to most animals.

The signs of old age are much the same in the American hare as in the English. The claws become blunt and ragged, the ears become dry and tough, and the cleft in the lip spreads. The general age is supposed to be six or seven years, though it is doubtful whether the exact age of any individual of the species has ever been ascertained.

In the summer time hares feed on various kinds of

juicy plants and grasses, as well as on the bark and buds of many small shrubs and bushes. They evince a great fondness for the twigs of the wild spice-bush (*Laurus benzoin*), and the shoots of the American black poplar tree (*Populus Hudsonica*). The latter tree is sometimes cut down by the American hunters for the purpose of attracting the hares, which come in numbers to feed on its branches.

In the winter months they are put to great shifts for food in the Northern States. Sometimes they gnaw the bark of various species of pine trees, or scratch up the snow for the purpose of obtaining the leaves and berries of the *Pyrola*, of which several species are found. They also seek greedily after the bark of willow and birch trees.

The skin of the American hare is very tender and easily torn, while the fur soon drops from it. It is not, therefore, in great request amongst the fur merchants, or much valued by the hat-maker.

When caught in snares, the hunter should be careful how he handles the hare, for it will scratch with the greatest vigour, inflicting severe wounds with its claws. Like most animals of its class, the American hare has many enemies besides men and their trained assistants —the hounds. The lynx, the panther, and the wild cat, all lie in wait for it as it bounds through the woods. The great snowy owl (*Surnea nyctea*) hovers through the open timber, or over the plain, waiting for an

opportunity to pounce down upon it. Hawks and falcons are its sworn foes; but they are all mild tormentors compared with the great horned-owl (*Bubo Virginianus*). Yet, in spite of all these, there are hares enough to afford good sport to a party of hunters, who don't mind leading rather a rough life for a week or two.

* * * * * *

The Texan hare (*Lepus Texianus*), or, as it is vulgarly called, jackass-rabbit, is a much larger animal than the common American hare. It has been found to measure a foot and nine inches in length from the nose to the root of the tail, the tail itself being fully four inches. Its ears are often more than six inches in length, and from this circumstance it received the name of jackass-rabbit from the early settlers in Texas and the adjoining regions. It is the largest of all hares found on the American continent, weighing sometimes as much as fourteen pounds. In colour it differs but slightly from other species. It has a dark brown stripe on the top of the neck, and a black stripe, extending from the rump to the tip of the tail, on its upper surface. The line of white on the belly and flanks is very irregular in shape. The whiskers are white, though a few of them are black at the roots. The young of the Texan hare have generally a white mark on the top of their heads. The fringe of hairs bordering the ears is very coarse and rigid.

This great hare has only a limited range, being only found in the western parts of Texas and the southern parts of New Mexico. It is so fleet of foot that, unless shot or chased by the fleetest of greyhounds, it is certain to escape.

All hares have much the same habits; and the great hare of Texas much resembles in its manners and customs the hares with which English sportsmen are acquainted; but it seems to resemble its namesake, the jackass, not only in length of ears, but in scarcity of sense. It has just sufficient brains to make it the greatest coward in all the animal kingdom. When once alarmed it runs as wildly as the deer, and as swiftly, without heeding what course it takes. One of these hares, while running from a greyhound, came in collision with another dog. The shock was so great that both animals were killed.

The flesh of the jackass-rabbit is fine eating; but as the thorough hunters of the woods and prairies think it a waste of lead to shoot them, they are left to the tender mercies of sporting Britishers and green Yankees from northern cities, where game is not so abundant. The regular backwood's-man seldom condescends to fire at anything less than a deer, unless he should, by chance, have an opportunity of killing a very fine turkey.

The Indians catch them much after the same manner as English poachers, by means of snares set in the

openings in the bushes through which the hares pass; but as brass wire is not so common on the prairies as it is in English villages, the Indians are compelled to construct their snares of a kind of hemp, or slips of hide —the whole very neatly twisted together. The Texan hare, unlike its more northern kinsman, has very little hair on its foot.

It is a beautiful sight to see one of these long-limbed animals bounding away. His feet are hardly seen to be extended, so rapidly are they moved. The animal seems to alight perpendicularly upon his feet at each leap. His long ears are thrown first forward, and then back upon the shoulders, and its head is stretched forward, as it appears to fly over the prairie ridges, like the swallow fliting over the surface of a sluggish stream in pursuit of insects.

The young of the Texan hare are littered about the month of April, or sometimes a little earlier. The animal does not much frequent low marshy lands, but appears fond of high open prairies where clumps of trees, dense bushes, and patches of briar, afford it safety from the attacks of eagles and the larger hawks. From other foes it trusts to escape by its speed.

When I first landed in Texas I was told most improbable stories concerning the size of these hares—some of the old hunters assuring me that they were as large as a dog of moderate size. I soon discovered that these old Nimrods were as good hands at drawing the long

bow as they were at long shots with the rifle; but for a short time I felt much disappointed at not being able to kill a single specimen weighing anything like the weights they had mentioned.

According to the old Jewish law, hares were classed amongst the ruminant animals; but in these modern days naturalists have assigned them a place amongst *rodentiâ*, or gnawing animals. There are, however, some few who still adhere to the old biblical classification; pointing out, in support of their opinion, the singular contraction of the stomach of the hare as being akin to the cavities observable in the other species of ruminating animals.

The Indians, in addition to their poaching practice of snaring the hares, shoot them with their arrows as they sit in their forms—approaching in a most stealthy manner, under cover of any bushes that may be in the neighbourhood. In this kind of sport the red-skins are very successful.

Sometimes they have a *battue* on a grand scale, which they conduct in the following manner: First of all, they construct a rude kind of net, from a species of hemp, of about four feet in width; and with this they enclose a large space where the ground is supposed to be favourable; in other words, where there is plenty of cover in the shape of clumps of wild myrtle-bushes, tufts of long grass, and shrubs. The net is kept in an upright position by means of pointed sticks driven into

the ground, of two or three yards, and to these sticks the net is firmly attached both at top and bottom. One of the Indian hunters takes his position at each supporting stake, armed with a heavy club.

Others of the tribe then go in and beat the bushes, accompanied by their dogs, if they have any; and by dint of ferocious yells and screams, soon frighten the poor hares from their forms. The frightened animals at once try to rush away by their usual paths, but are stopped by the nets; and then the Indian knocks them on the head, one after another, with great dexterity. A large party of the Indians has been known to kill at least two hundred hares in one day, in this way.

Another species of hare found in the Southern States of America is the Swamp hare (*Lepus aquaticus*). It is about the size of the common hare, though it differs slightly in colour. Its habits are very peculiar, differing from all our preconceived notions of the family. It is very seldom seen on high grounds or on rolling prairies, but lives by the side of ponds and lakes, or by the side of a stream—invariably choosing the most marshy spots as a feeding ground. It takes to the water almost as freely as a Newfoundland dog, and is often seen swimming from place to place in search of various aquatic plants, of which it is very fond. Its instinct always leads it to take to water when chased by man or dog, and there its scent is lost. But in avoiding one

danger it frequently falls into another, namely, into the mouth of an alligator. Sometimes it makes its home beneath the overhanging roots of trees that grow by the water-side where there is a hollow, caused by the action of the waters amongst the roots. In such cases it will generally swim to its home, so as to leave no clue to its hiding place. A swamp hare has been known to swim three times across a wide river when pursued by the dogs, and finally escape beneath one of these hollow roots.

This hare breeds at about the same times and seasons as other hares; making for its young a nest of dried grass or leaves, on the top of some mound or hillock in the swamp. It is not found very far north, but is numerous in Western Alabama, the lower part of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Besides these species, there are two or three others; but they are small in size and afford poor sport compared with the great Texan hare and the swamp hare.

None of these Southern hares are fit for food in the summer. A small red bug, so small as to be almost invisible, attacks them under the fore-arms and thighs, and produces sores, which soon become fly-blown. Maggots are then produced and, very often, the hare is eaten up alive.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE AMERICAN BLACK BEAR.

URSUS AMERICANUS.

*Characteristics.*—Black; a brown or yellowish patch on each side of the nose.

*Description.*—Oval erect ears, rounded at the tips; the hair projects slightly beyond the claws, which are short and blunt. Long, shining, straight, and rather soft fur.

*Colour.*—Generally black, though in some instances a brownish tinge is observable in the fur; the sides of the nose are of a fawn colour. Very often found with a dash of white under the throat, and rarely, though sometimes they have been found, with a white star in the forehead.

Found from Mexico to Labrador, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

THE black bear is found throughout the American continent, except in a very small district to the north-east, where civilisation has dislodged him from the country. They abound in the extreme North Canada and the snow-bound regions of the Hudson's Bay territory; and in the Southern States, in Mississippi, in Louisiana, in Arkansas, in Texas, and Florida, the bear-hunt still ranks amongst the established field

sports, and the hunters have no reason to complain of scarcity of game. A hundred years ago the peculiar and special haunt of the black bear was in the dense cane-brakes that fringed the banks of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

In these districts the settlers formerly suffered great losses from the depredations of the '*varmint*;' corn-patches, gardens, and even hog-pens, being robbed by these unscrupulous freebooters. The settlers, however, combined and organised bear-hunts on a large scale, carrying the war into the enemies' country, and constantly beating up such portions of the forests as were known or believed to afford refuge to the animal. By this method their numbers were reduced, and in these districts few are now to be found.

English sportsmen, who have, in all probability, never drawn trigger on any animal larger than a rabbit or hare, may be led to suppose that bear-hunting is a very dangerous pastime, and that those who indulge in it necessarily expose themselves to a great deal of risk from panthers, wolves, and other animals besides the bears themselves. But the fact is, few hunters die in the forest or on the prairie. A man who willingly and from pure love of sport faces the perils of the wilderness has generally sufficient courage, experience, and presence of mind, to carry him safely through all dangers and difficulties. A danger is seldom attended with fatal consequences to a man who thoroughly under-

stands and prepares cheerfully to meet it. At all events, Gordon Cumming, and dozens of others, passed through every kind of danger without loss of life or limb; and Waterton, the naturalist, after all his '*Wanderings*' beyond the bounds of civilisation, died a peaceful death in his own home, at an age far exceeding that which commonly falls to the lot of man.

The common black bear of America is disposed to lead a very quiet and peaceable existence if allowed to do so; acting upon the schoolboy's principle, 'Leave me alone, and I will leave you alone.' When the female has cubs, she will defend them, as a matter of course; and when brought to bay by hunters and dogs, a fight sometimes takes place; but both men and hounds are generally too wary to allow the bear to inflict any serious injury. Very savage dogs are not (strange as it may appear) the proper animals with which to hunt the black bear. A dog who would at once rush upon the foe, a bull dog for instance, who, in all probability, would seize the bear by the throat or head, and hang to him, would most certainly come to grief; he would be killed 'before he knew what hurt him,' as they say in the West. Active wary dogs, animals that seem to know how to 'fight and run away,' and, watching their opportunity to give the bear a severe bite when his attention is distracted, then bound away out of his reach, these are the dogs for bear-hunting. But the sport is seldom attended with danger, and instances

have been known where even the she-bear, evidently considering discretion the better part of valour, has abandoned her cubs to the mercy of the hunter, and sought safety in the dense jungle. In walking through the forest in Brazos county with Colonel A——, we saw a four months old cub gathering blackberries. My companion, the Colonel, instantly fired, hitting it in the breast as it sat up plucking the berries, and the youngster at once rolled over, making a terrible outcry about its wound. The old bear, who had been sheltered by the tall brambles, took to her heels at the sound of the shot, in her hurry and fright running against and over the cub. In striking against him, she fell, but, quickly regaining her feet, was soon lost to sight in the wood.

On another occasion, while out alone in the evening, riding along a rough road which had been cut through the forest for the purpose of hauling timber, I caught a glimpse of two dark objects which crossed the road a little distance ahead, and disappeared in some young cane. I dismounted, tied my horse to a tree, and as I walked up to see if I could find the objects which I had seen so indistinctly, a third black animal walked across the road. This time I saw plainly enough a half-grown bear cub. Slipping quietly along, I soon gained the spot where they had crossed, and after a careful search could see the cane stems move here and there in parts where the bears were busily devouring the young stems. I tried for some time to distinguish the old lady from

her cubs, but owing to the darkness this was impossible, and at length growing impatient, I pulled at the first dark hide I could see. It proved to be one of the young bears, which in a very loud voice protested against the indignity offered it; but the mother and the rest of the family thought only of their own safety, and beat a rapid retreat into the densest part of the cane-thicket, the bending reeds indicating the course of their hurried flight.

The grizzly bear alone is really formidable, and as this dangerous animal is to be found only on the borders of the Rocky Mountains, it is hardly necessary to speak of it here. But the hunter must possess iron nerves and an unerring eye who ventures to rouse the grizzly bear from his den.

The young cubs are frequently caught and trained up as pets. Tame bears are not at all uncommon on plantations in the Southern States. They are very amusing so long as they remain small, but when they reach a year's age, they become too large and mischievous to be tolerated, and are generally killed. In captivity they are sometimes known to exhibit very decided anti-teetotal principles. A Spaniard who kept a drinking shop in New Orleans had a tame bear which had acquired a strong liking for whisky toddy, and, unless supplied with his favourite beverage, became very troublesome and unruly.

When the female is about to produce her offspring,

she retires to some hollow tree, the entrance to which is high up in the trunk or in the fork of the branches, that being the spot in which she is best able to defend her young ones from their enemies. The male shifts all the troubles, cares, and anxieties, of providing for and defending the family to the shoulders of the lady bear; he retires to some secluded spot beneath a fallen tree, the crevice of a rock, or some similar situation where he can rest undisturbed and without being worried by the cries and squabbles which take place in the nursery amongst the baby bears. In the most ungallant and unsociable manner, he divides his time between eating and sleeping, issuing from his retreat only for the purpose of feeding after the sun has set. Even in the non-torpid season he passes the greater part of the day in his den fast asleep, and will hardly bestir himself when disturbed by the hunter's dog. He only gives a grunt or two of disapprobation, and, like the sluggard, seems disposed for a little more sleep, a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the paws for rest. It is only a full burst of music from the entire pack that will rouse him to a full sense of his danger.

The black bear is an omnivorous feeder. In Texas, Louisiana, and the Southern States, he gets fat upon the good things cultivated by the planters, sugar-cane and young maize, while by way of dessert he will greedily devour wild grapes, sweet acorns, pecan-nuts, and persimmons. Wild turkeys and other birds often pull

rotten wood to pieces for the sake of the grubs and ants' eggs concealed therein; but the bear makes short work of an old tree trunk, scattering the decayed wood in every direction in search of his coveted dainties. The hunter in his wanderings through the forest frequently meets with these traces of the bear's repast.

'Cuffy,' as the black bear is familiarly called—the grizzly being honoured with the soubriquet of 'Old Ephraim'—is passionately fond of honey, a taste which is, of course, a terrible annoyance to the industrious wild bees of the American forest. The professional bee-hunter does not follow them more perseveringly, and when the bear has once discovered a tree containing bees, he does not rest till he has feasted upon the honey. Confident in the protection of his shaggy fur against the stings of the insects, he ascends the trunk of the tree, and, if the opening be large enough, at once thrusts in his paws, bringing them out covered with honey, which he sucks off with the leisurely air of a gourmand. If he cannot at once insert his paw, he holds on to the trunk of the tree, and with his teeth gnaws away till the hole by which the bees enter is large enough to allow him to effect his object. Then he gorges away, treating the attacks of the bees themselves with the most philosophical indifference. If, however, by a lucky chance, one of the angry insects should contrive to insert its sting in a tender part, such as the eye or the lip, the bear instantly quits his hold

and rolls to the ground. He then generally runs off into the forest; but this is only a short retreat, and as soon as the smart of the sting has abated, the bear returns with increased appetite to the attack, seldom leaving the tree whilst any honey remains. Some old hunters go so far as to assert that he rolls himself in mud before attacking the bees, thus assuming an armour impervious to their stings.

The bear is also fond of pork. A sucking-pig is his delight, though, if the porker of tender years is not easily procurable, he will not scruple to regale himself with a hog of mature age and size. This partiality for pork often leads Bruin into fatal mishaps; for the pig naturally objects to be eaten alive, and its shrill cries often awakens its owner, who calls his dogs, and with a bullet from his rifle settles accounts with the bear.

The Indians in former times had a special veneration for the bear. Their peculiar system of theology, if it may so be called, taught them that the inferior races of animals were possessed of souls as well as men. They therefore attributed to the bear a kind of homogeneous sympathy with themselves, and performed many ceremonious rites before hunting him; purifying themselves and offering up numerous sacrifices.

The black bear does not arrive at its full growth till it has attained an age of six or seven years, when it has been known to reach the enormous weight of six hundred pounds.

The more we learn of the bear's nature and habits, the more must we admire his mental qualifications. The animal quite deserves the title (bestowed upon him by the American trapper) of 'The knowingest varmint as is.' The bear perhaps displays more of *mind* in his mode of life and habits than any other beast of the chase, and has the organ of order very fully developed. So long as they haunt a particular portion of the forest, they always make use of the same pathway, whether proceeding to water or to their feeding ground.

In walking they move both legs on the right side together at the same time, and then those on the other side; always taking particular care to place the paws on the track previously made, so as to avoid making more signs of their progress than necessary. In crossing creeks, streams, or chasms, they always use as a bridge the fallen tree to which they have been accustomed, and in robbing a cornfield or cane plantation take a somewhat similar course, unless indeed anything should chance to scare them from their accustomed regularity, always climbing the fence at the same spot.

In many parts of the forest may be seen marks made by the bears with their teeth on the bark of young trees or stout bushes, at as great a height as the animal can reach. Though almost every bear-hunter is aware of this habit, and some few naturalists and sporting writers have made mention of it, few have made any

effort to account for it. From the height of these marks an experienced hunter can judge to within a few pounds the weight of the bear, long before the animal is killed or has even been seen. For my own part I am of opinion that these marks are nothing more or less than matrimonial advertisements set up in a place of public meeting, and intended to inform the lady bears that there is in the forest hard by a gentleman at present disengaged, and not disinclined to take a partner. The marks, or 'bites,' as the hunters term them, may also serve as a hint to rivals of the male sex to abstain from attempting to win the good graces of the lady sought for. Translated into English the challenge means, 'Here am I, as fine a bear as prowls this forest, as you may see by my bite, which is seven feet four inches from the ground; therefore you may easily guess my fighting weight to be close upon five hundred pounds. Stand clear, then, young gentlemen bears, for if you presume to trespass in pursuit of my game, I shall be compelled to give you a few ugly hugs; so sharpen your claws and fangs.'

Traps are sometimes set for bears, but though occasionally caught in them, the bears rarely remain there long; it requires a trap of the largest size, skilfully arranged and concealed, and of uncommon strength, to hold a bear. But where their path to a cornfield is plainly marked and regularly used, the planters sometimes set spring-guns for them, and generally with

success. This is a method never practised by the sportsman who trusts in his dog and his rifle; but the cultivators of the soil are often driven to it in self-defence, to protect themselves from an animal which not only eats a large quantity but destroys much more than he devours. A single bear will do an immense amount of mischief in one short night, trampling down and destroying as much as a quarter of an acre of Indian corn or sugar-cane.

The greatest ingenuity is required to set a spring-gun with success; it is necessary to understand, to a certain extent, the *mind* of the four-footed foe; for the result of the slightest error or miscalculation will be the loss of all the labour bestowed upon the trap. In the first place the planter must know the size of the robber, and if he has not actually been seen, this information can be obtained only from the tracks in the soil or the before-mentioned *bites* on the trees. This is the most important point, for on the size of the bear to be killed depends the height at which the gun must be placed. If set too low, the bear may escape untouched; if on the other hand it be pointed too high, a slight wound only will be the consequence, and 'Cuffy' will escape to the forest, perhaps to die of his wound, perhaps to recover. Next the gun must be set early in the morning, very soon after his last visit; this being necessary on account of the extraordinary keenness of his scent. Unless the smell of human hands

has been entirely evaporated by the sun and wind of the day, his powers of smell will inform him of the hidden danger, and he will only retire for a short time to seek out some new and safe route to his favourite feeding ground.

The size of the bear having been calculated to a nicety, the next thing to be done is to drive into the ground two stout stakes, to which a rifle or gun is firmly fixed, with the muzzle pointed so as to be on a level with the beast's heart as he advances along the centre of the path. A string must be attached to the trigger and brought round the hindmost post, then carried forward beyond the muzzle of the weapon, passed round a peg fixed in the path in the front and on the right of the gun, and from thence strained right across the path to a second peg fixed on the left-hand side of the path. A small branch made to appear as though it had dropped from the tree over head must hang carelessly upon this line, so as to conceal the deadly weapon from the bear's sight, which is almost as acute as his sense of smell. All this innocent-looking bunch of twigs and the trigger-string must be carefully adjusted at such a height that the bear shall not think of leaping over the slight obstacle, but shall be tempted to thrust it aside with his nose.

As soon as the darkness of evening has rendered travelling safe in the bear's opinion, he rouses himself, and starts leisurely on his accustomed path towards the

cornfield. He has a good memory, and, recollecting that there was no obstacle in his path when last he came that way, halts as soon as he perceives the branch, stands a moment as though in doubt, looks round, and finally takes a sniff at it. But the bear who hesitates is lost; there is nothing at all peculiar in the smell of the branch, and at last, convinced that it is nothing but a windfall from the tree above, he makes an effort to throw it out of his way with his nose, and in so doing pulls the string which is attached to the trigger of the gun.

A terrific noise is the result as the hammer falls, and another awful row follows as the contents of the gun pierce poor Cuffy's breast. If the gun has been carefully set, the bear dies, and everyone on the plantation, master, negroes, and even dogs, will enjoy plenty of fat bear meat for a couple of days. If judgment has not been used, the bear will escape, and it would simply be a waste of time to set another spring-gun for him, for ever after he will exercise a wonderful degree of prudence in pursuing his nocturnal journeys.

In certain districts of Texas, where the greater part of my hunting adventures took place, the 'mast-' bearing timber sometimes fails to produce its usual fruit. I have passed through a wood not far from the river-side where scarcely an acorn was to be found; while in another wood not far distant the trees were

literally bending beneath the weight of their load. As in such cases all kinds of game are led by a kind of instinct to seek the fruitful parts of the forest, the hunter will be well rewarded for his trouble if he seeks the richly loaded woods. When the mast famine extends over a very large tract of land, the plantations and fields suffer great losses from the ravages of all kinds of game. The overseer makes his appearance before the planter, morning after morning, with a long face and a catalogue of calamities; the cornfields trampled down and destroyed, pumpkins and melons disappearing, a couple of fat porkers absent without leave, and no end of bear tracks round about the fences. At such times even the most good-natured planter feels his 'dander' rise, and is apt to make rash vows regarding the total extermination of the whole of the bear tribe.

Among the Southern planters, who used before the late war to indulge more than any other Americans in the wild sports of the forest and prairie, parties were sometimes made up for the purpose, and with the avowed intention of passing days or even weeks in the woods, where they roused the game in a style which was infinitely more pleasant to themselves than to the poor turkeys, deer, and bears. A long life in the South-Western States has given me such a taste for that kind of amusement that being at the present time unable to join in a real hunt, I endeavour to recall the

past, and by a stretch of imagination carry myself back once more to those greenwood aisles.

When the day has been fixed for the bear-hunt, the neighbours are invited to meet at the planter's house an hour before daybreak, and thither they all repair, each man bringing with him every dog he can procure. The first operation to be performed after meeting is one in which all acquit themselves tolerably well, the consumption of a hearty breakfast, the principal features of which are venison, steaks, hot cakes, and coffee, followed by just a mere trifle from the whisky flask to counteract the effects of the morning air. This done, they mount their nags and proceed to the woods with their motley crew of dogs, who instinctively divine that something of importance is in the wind, and are less quarrelsome than on ordinary occasions. They have indeed good need to preserve all their pugilistic qualities for the serious business on hand.

The method in which a bear-hunt is arranged is generally this. Amongst the dogs are to be found two or three trained exclusively to hunt bear and nothing else. The owners of these animals ride round the outskirts of a field where it approaches the forest, accompanied by their hounds, the other hunters keeping with the main pack from fifty to a hundred yards behind. As soon as the track of a bear is crossed, where the animal has either entered or left the field, the start-dogs at once detect the scent, and open on the trail, followed

by the whole pack with a chorus of canine music that would cheer the heart of a fox-hunter. The hunters do not scruple to throw down the rails, and passing out, follow the pack at full speed towards the bear's den, which is usually not very far off—the bear being a lazy brute, who objects to living at any great distance from the field which affords him food. If the dogs come upon him before he is able to make his escape from the stronghold, he sits up on his hind legs and regards them with just the defiant expression of countenance assumed by Fitz James when surprised by the clansmen of Roderick Dhu. The dogs generally decline his 'Come one come all!' invitation, and content themselves with carrying on a light infantry warfare. The hunters have not much difficulty in following the pack, and each man, dismounting, rushes forward anxious for the honour of the first shot at the bear. At other times, when the game is more wide awake, the quarry puts his best leg out, and forces his way at full speed into the most impenetrable recesses of the cane-brake. The canes bend beneath his weight and close up again, making it very difficult for the less heavy dogs to follow, and altogether impossible for the hunters who have to be guided in their course by the baying of the hounds. I have known the bear escape unscathed, through forcing himself head foremost by sheer weight and strength into a dense jungle. This he will often do unless closely pursued, for although he has such a

clumsy appearance, he is by no means a slow-footed beast, but shuffles along with considerable speed.

On some occasions, particularly when fat, he prefers to climb a tree at once, even when not hardly pressed by the dogs; and sometimes he is so worried as to be obliged to take refuge over the heads of his persecutors. The dogs remain baying under the tree till the hunters arrive, when a few bullets well aimed bring him to the ground.

But I had hunted alone in the woods, and killed at least half-a-dozen bears by myself, before I had a chance of taking part in a regular hunting frolic. At length I was invited by Major C—— to make one of a party of about a dozen in a regular camp-hunt through a swampy district on the banks of the Caney Creek, which was well known to be alive with game of every description. We were not, on this occasion, to hunt any particular robber, or avenge any specially injured plantation, but hunt for the sake of sport, making a long journey during one day, sleeping in the woods at night, and on the following morning we were to explore the canebrake, which, according to the words of an experienced hunter who knew the ground, was 'swarming with all the varmints on airth.'

The swamp had originally been the bed of the river Colorado, which had changed its course into a new channel. In a few spots, stouter vegetation had forced its way up through the brake, but still the canes were

the principal features of the jungle, growing together in dense clusters of great height. These patches extended in some cases over several square miles of ground, and were so matted and tangled together with briars, wild vines, and other creeping plants, that the only method of getting through was literally to carve out a road with the hunting-knife. This was often indispensable when the hounds had treed their quarry, or had found him more than a match for their united strength.

The tall canes (*Arundo gigantea*) are frequently used as fishing-rods in the Northern States; they grow up to a height of thirty feet or more, and near the ground are as large as a small stove-pipe, tapering upwards gradually till they are as slender as crow-quills.

'Old Ben Thompson has promised to join us, so we are pretty certain of sport,' said the Major, as he wished me good-bye after receiving my promise to join the expedition. Ben Thompson, or 'Uncle Ben,' as he was more commonly called, was one of the oldest settlers in the State of Texas, and the keenest sportsman that ever drew trigger. His chief characteristic was a deep and undying hatred of the Mexicans; the reason for which was that he had lost two sons engaged in the 'War of Independence' which Texas waged against Mexico. Uncle Ben bitterly lamented their death, and swore a solemn oath never to shave until he had slain Santa Anna, or heard of his death. At the period of which I speak—

thirteen years ago—Ben Thompson's beard reached nearly to his waist, so that by this time it must descend to his toes.

As the journey to be made ere we reached the hunting-grounds was a long one, I carried with me (for the sake of being comparatively unencumbered) only my double-shot gun, which, when charged with buck-shot, was no contemptible weapon, and would, I hoped, give a good account of any game I might meet with at close quarters. But I should have carried a rifle in spite of all risks and inconveniences, had I known the contempt which my poor double barrel would bring upon me in the opinion of the redoubtable Ben.

'I guess you are one o' them thar counter-skippers from the city by the look of the gun you carry?' he remarked, when I was introduced to him.

'No,' replied I. 'I hope to be a hunter some day, after I have had a little more of your society. I can use the rifle now a little, though I suppose you never carry any other weapon.'

'I guess I don't pretend to use anything else,' said Ben in tones of the deepest disgust. 'As for the bars, they'd only laugh at that thar tool of yourn unless you war right atop of them. What does an animal care for a peppering if you don't put the lead right into his vitals? and who wants a gun as full of shot as a 'bacca pod is of seed?'

'Are bears so very difficult to kill then?' I asked.

'Stranger, bars don't die easy. No! It is a bar's natur to live, and a bar is uncommon particular about that. If you shoots a bar with a little trifling bullet, he takes no more heed of it than of a 'skeeter bite. If you wants to stop a bar sixty or a hundred yards off, to roll the animal over right in his tracks, you must use a chunk of lead like this'—he drew an ounce bullet from his pocket—'you must have a shootin'-stick like this one of mine, and you must put a man behind it as can bark a branch without knocking the dewdrops off the leaves!'

'I cannot aim so delicately as that at present, though I mean to practise every day,' said I. 'Still, I should fancy a shot-gun would be useful at times; I should suppose, for instance, you would not think of shooting at a snipe or quail with a rifle?'

'I shouldn't think of doing it; I should think of half a thousand other things afore I wasted powder on account of such rubbish. Why, my old rifle would knock such trifles as that clean into the middle of last week. I never shoots at anything as isn't game; and in my opinion nothing is game that has got no marrow in its bones.'

'Why, don't you consider birds game?'

'Well, stranger, pree-haps they may be—pree-haps such rubbish may be game for city folk—for all human natur naturally takes to hunting. So that shot-guns

and birds may do for the settlement folk, because it's the best they can get, and may be after all better than nothing. Why, I once see an out-and-out bar-dog take to rat-killing when the poor beast had the misfortune to be carried to a town.'

The old hunter gave a huge sigh as he thought of the degenerate bear-dog.

The party consisted of experienced hunters, most of whom could exhibit an ugly scar or two received in the chase. They were men who could live in the woods, and hold their own against either bears or Indians, yet they placed themselves without the least hesitation under the command of Uncle Ben, as though they had been novices from the city: a striking proof of the esteem in which he was held, and the qualifications which he was known to possess.

Luckily for me, I was not the only man who carried a shot-gun; and the wrath of our leader was thus soon diverted to some other offenders who bore similar weapons. There were at least six so armed.

About an hour before sunset we reached the spot where it was proposed to camp for the night, and all speedily staked their horses, after watering them at a small brook. Our lower limbs were so stiffened by the ride that we were not sorry to stretch them once more on firm ground. A fire was kindled against a huge fallen tree, which formed an admirable back log; huge branches were heaped upon it, and soon a blazing flame

illumined the gloom of the forest, shooting up showers of sparks each time the logs were stirred towards the blue star-spangled sky above. Comfortable couches were formed out of the young cane-tops, upon which blankets were spread. Our suppers were easily cooked by the bright fire, round which we placed in a circle all our goods and chattels, such as saddles and guns. The dogs were in every part of the ring; in fact, it was difficult to move without treading upon some lazy brute.

The injunctions of our leader were 'early to bed and early to rise,' and when we sat down first, we intended to obey; but after a supper of venison ribs (we had killed a good fat buck by the way), and tin cups of *café noir*, we filled the same utensils with hot grog, lit our pipes, and listened to a multitude of good stories, to which the scene and the occasion gave rise. The pipes would not burn out with the story, and had to be refilled in the middle of the next good tale; and it was not till one of the party announced that only a couple of hours' sleep could be allowed to us that the hunters rolled themselves in their blankets. The bright stars began to pale above us, and the fire had burnt into a mass of glowing red embers before we slept, leaving to the last man up the task of keeping together the fire till morning, which all agreed could not be very far off.

The short space of sleeping time passed away, and as soon as it became light and the birds tuned their pipes, all hands aroused themselves for the coming bear-hunt.

But before the hunt began, the most careful sportsmen of the party found many little things to do. After a night passed in the woods, the dew leaves its damp marks upon the guns; bullet-pouches have been left carelessly on the wet grass, blankets have to be rolled up, horses to be saddled, to say nothing of preparing and swallowing a breakfast much resembling the previous evening's supper; so that the sun had been up at least an hour before we were all ready.

The pack of hounds was tolerably large and very mixed in character, comprising dogs of every breed and age. Some were quiet reserved old hounds, thoroughly up to their business, and in many cases bearing marks of former encounters on their skins. These old stagers seemed to have a thorough contempt for the younger members of the association, who would scamper off after rabbits, squirrels, and other small animals. The old dogs paid no attention to the yells and barks of the youngsters, though they would seemingly sneer at some puppy as he bounded by, as if to say, 'Just wait till a bear's afoot, and we'll see whether you'll be so forward.'

'Keep your eye on Spring, that black dog,' said Major C——. 'If he gives tongue, you may bet high that it's a find.'

'You wait till Rush puts in a word or two,' exclaimed Uncle Ben; 'he never lies. He don't bark, Rush don't, but he means work.'

Ben Thompson, as leader, had command of every-

thing connected with the hunt, and assigned to each man his station in the cane-brake. As it was impossible to say which way the bear would pass when roused by the hounds, there was no grumbling at the arrangements made. Each hunter remained at his post, straining his ears to catch the slightest sound that might indicate the tidings that the bear was roused from his den. The puppies occasionally gave tongue as they found the scent of some small game, but as they were not backed up by the more experienced dogs, they soon became ashamed of such unnecessary noise, and hunted away in silence. Half-an-hour passed away. Uncle Ben was by turns in every part of the thicket, cheering the dogs, and occasionally correcting them when inclined to be wild or careless.

'They'll find the varmint soon,' he said, 'if he's anywhere hereabouts.'

He had scarcely finished speaking when Rush, his own dog, put his nose to the ground, then lifted it, stooped down once more, as though to make sure, and finally gave a long deep howl. Two or three others came running up at the sound, and confirmed the decision.

'That's the right music,' shouted Uncle Ben. 'Hark to the old dog, lads!'

A loud blast on the old hunter's horn called up the stragglers, and in a few moments the whole pack plunged into the forest in one direction, waking the echoes with their musical cries. From the heavy

growth of the canes, the hounds could make but slow progress, while the weight and strength of the bear enabled him to crash through the reeds, which closed up again behind him.

Most of the hunters, disregarding Uncle Ben's injunctions to remain at their posts, followed the pack, the cane crashing beneath their tread, while the cry of the hounds became fainter each minute.

'Come along, lads!—he can't go far that way, the river will stop him,' shouted Uncle Ben with a voice as clear as a bell. 'Come along, lads! and we'll give him pepper as he comes back. But don't keep together in a bunch; spread out a bit.'

After a sharp run made up of creeping and crawling through the jungle, and running over the open space, it became evident from the increasing distinctness of the dogs' voices that the bear had turned back from the river, and was once more making his way towards us on a course parallel to that which he had taken before. Then the clamour seemed stationary for a short time, then again it seemed as though he were dodging backwards and forwards over nearly the same ground. All pressed forward to intercept the bear, and, if possible, get the first shot at him. At length a continuous yelling and clamour proceeding from one spot made it quite evident that the bear had either come to bay or had ascended a tree. All hands hastened forward, and it was soon discovered that the

latter was the case. The bear had climbed a huge tree, and then disappeared into a hole where the branches forked, about thirty feet from the ground.

At the foot of the tree the dogs were dancing about in a state of great excitement at the escape of their prey, scratching at the ground, and gnawing at the roots; some of the old ones were stretched out, seemingly perfectly exhausted with the sharp chase, though as soon as the hunters made their appearance they leaped up, ready and willing to renew their efforts at the shortest notice. By some oversight, which seldom occurs in an American hunting-party, no one had thought of bringing an axe, and for a few seconds we all stared at each other, looking, as may be supposed, very foolish.

'What's to be done, Ben?' asked Major C——.

'Why, make him show out, to be sure,' was the response.

'It's all very well to say that, Ben,' replied the Major; 'but how, in the name of heaven, are we to do it?'

'Smoke!'

'Of course! how thick-headed I must be not to have thought of that.'

'If, as I fancy, the tree is hollow right down to the roots,' continued old Thompson, 'we'll make a fire there, and soon cure his bacon; and if it isn't, why, we can throw some moss and chunks of dry wood up into

the hollow. Never you fear, boys, I'll make the varmint show.'

And Uncle Ben soon showed himself fully equal to the task. The tree was found to be hollow right down to the ground, and where the large roots branched off there was a slight opening. Round this the hunters built a pile of dry sticks and moss, to which a light was applied; this, being fanned with their broad sombreros, soon burst out into a splendid fire. Before long, faint wreaths of smoke were seen to ascend from the hole between the forks of the branches where the bear had entered, and the bear could be heard moving about within the tree, and grunting in evident disapprobation of the method adopted by the hunters.

The flame, fanned by hats, soon communicated with the rotten touchwood inside the hollow trunk. Heaps of damp green moss were piled up, and clouds of dense smoke driven by the wind up through the hollow tree, which formed a capital chimney, till it at length compelled poor Cuffy to 'fly to ills he knew not of than bear with those he had.' Accordingly, he made his appearance at the mouth of the hole, the very impersonation of impotent rage and terror. His once glossy black coat was singed to a rusty brown colour, his eyes were blinded by the smoke, and his jaws were covered with foam.

'I told you he'd have to show out, lads,' cried Uncle Ben, as he deliberately raised his rifle.

The smoke puffed from the muzzle of the piece as the bullet struck him. The ounce of lead buried itself in his flesh, and the bear, giving a start up, seemingly crouched down again. The old hunter coolly wiped out his rifle with a bunch of tow attached to the end of his loading-rod, and the others immediately discharged their shot-guns at the bear.

'Fire away, boys!' cried Uncle Ben in sneering tones; 'I'd make a sieve of his old hide, I would, if I was you.'

'Do you want the varmint to get clean away?' answered one of the men.

'Why, the bear's dead!' exclaimed Major C——, after a more close inspection.

'I should think he was,' answered Ben. 'Didn't you see me shoot?'

'Certainly, but then he looked alive.'

'I killed that bar as dead as a herring the first shot —I never shoots twice; but in course so long as other folks chose to pepper away, it's no business of mine.'

Having thus sufficiently disgraced the shot-guns, Uncle Ben leisurely finished loading his piece. The dead bear was all this while in the fork of the tree, at a height of at least thirty feet from the ground on which we were standing, and it was necessary to get him down before we could despoil him of his furry robe. Uncle Ben volunteered to ascend and roll the animal from its resting-place.

Around the trunk was twisted a stout grape-vine, which afforded the hunter a means of ascent, and in a few minutes he was by the side of the bear. With much exertion he managed to push it over so far that the weight of one portion overbalanced the remainder, and the carcase fell heavily, the dead bear seeming to clutch at something as he fell, but his paws only cut the clean air.

But the animal was destined to be avenged even in death, and his vengeance cost poor Uncle Ben dearly. His dog Rush, anxious to be foremost in worrying the bear, when dead, as he had been in the chase, rushed in too soon; the bear, a large full-grown one, weighing five hundred and fifty pounds, fell with a crash upon the poor dog, and broke both back and neck. The old hunter was almost as much grieved by this unfortunate occurrence as though he had lost a child; while his sorrow cast a gloom over us all.

'Ah!' said he, as he knelt by the side of the dead hound, 'he was a good dog, was poor Rush. I didn't think a very great deal of him while he was a pup, but he soon fought his way into notice, and you all know what a dog he was this morning. One thing is certain, though, if, as the redskins say, dogs go to the happy hunting-grounds, Rush will be certain to have plenty of good meat and a kind master, for he was a brave and truthful dog!'

So died the first bear I ever saw killed in a regular

hunt. Others were killed that day, but an account of the chase would be in a great measure a repetition. The danger was very small compared with the size and strength of the game we were following; in fact, a walk through the crowded streets of London on a damp foggy day is attended with far more danger to life and limb than the pursuit of the black bear in the forests and cane-brakes of Texas and the neighbouring States.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE WILD HOG.

THE COLLARED PECCARY; DYCOTYLES TORQUATUS—THE COMMON HOG; SUS SCROFA.

THE peccary is the only native American wild hog, although there are now thousands of wild pigs in the forests, the descendants of the common or domestic hogs which have strayed away from the settlers, and whose descendants are now as much wild boars as any to be found in the great German or Polish forests.

The form of the peccary is not unlike that of the domestic hog, though it is short, compact, and very much smaller.

In Texas they go by the name of Mexican hogs, and in the early settlement of the country they frequently proved very troublesome; the settlers, when hunting game in the forest, or looking after their live stock, being often surprised by the attack of half-a-dozen peccaries, who put them up the nearest tree, and often kept them there for hours. As these hogs proved most destructive to the cornfields, a general war was

declared against them, and so thoroughly were they hunted, that in the settled portions of the State very few are to be found.

Before speaking of my own interviews with them, I shall quote Mr. W. P. Smith's account of his capture of two peccaries, premising that Mr. Smith was sent out in 1841 by the late Earl of Derby for the purpose of procuring living animals for the Earl's collection at Knowsley.

Mr. Smith says:—'The two I send you are the only ones I have heard of since my arrival in this country. I happened, with the assistance of a person, to find out their lair, which is always in some hollow tree, although they have many sleeping-places. Being late in the day, I was determined not to disturb them until a more favourable time would present itself, as I was anxious, if possible, to procure them alive. Some time passed, and everything being ready, the dogs soon compelled them to make for home, when, they having entered, we secured the entrance of their hole, and cut a large opening up the body of the tree, a few feet above them, from which "point of vantage" we were enabled easily to drop a noose round their necks, which we tightened until we thought they were nearly suffocated; we then drew them out, tied their legs and feet securely, and fastened their mouths by binding their jaws together with cords, and then left them lying on the ground for a time. On our return,

we found that they had got over the effect of the experimental hanging they had gone through. We put them across a horse, and, in trying to get loose, they so tightened the ropes and entangled them about their necks, that they died before we observed this on our way home with them. This is the usual mode of taking these animals alive, although some are caught in pits. They have a large musk-bag upon the back, from which a strong, disagreeable odour is emitted whilst the animal is excited; but this is not observable after they are killed. The flesh of the female is good at some seasons of the year, but that of the male is strong, coarse, and disagreeable at all times. Their principal food consists of nuts of every description (mast) during the winter, but in summer they feed on succulent plants, with which the bottom lands on the Brazos abound. The male measured forty inches from the tip of its nose to that of its tail. The female is shorter by two inches. The eyes are very dark hazel colour.'

The first time I ever saw a living peccary was in the San Bernard Forest, bordering that river, when I was out in search of game.* On that occasion I had just discharged my rifle at a turkey, when all at once I heard some palmettos shake behind, and, turning my head, I saw two peccaries rushing, one after the other,

* This narrative is quoted from an account of the peccary which I contributed to *The Leisure Hour*.

towards me. I had just time to drop my empty gun, and swing myself up a tree, as the two passed rapidly underneath, viciously snapping at the place which, ten seconds before, had been occupied by my legs.

I believe that my gun's report disturbed them when they were feeding; and that they were in full retreat for their den, between which place and them I was standing.

The next time I saw any I was on the Brazos River with Colonel Compton, a planter, whose dogs began baying at the mouth of a large fallen hollow log. At the entrance of the hole protruded the head of a peccary. The animal was churning its jaws till they were white with foam; and so resolutely did it seem determined to defend its den, that Colonel Compton's fierce bear-dogs dared not approach. The Colonel shot the peccary in the forehead, and killed it. I was about to go forward and pull it out, when the Colonel told me I had better not, as most likely there were more there. After loading his rifle, he cut a long grape-vine, and, forming a noose with one end of it, he managed, after a little trouble, to poke and twist it forward, till he got it over the pig's head, and so hauled the carcase away. No sooner was this done, than another peccary's head took up the position of the former one; and in this way the Colonel killed seven—all that were in the den.

Three or four years went by, after seeing these

last, before I met with any more of these animals, and I had almost forgotten that such little vicious brutes were to be found in the woods, when, one November day, as I was crawling towards a pond in the forest where I had seen some wild ducks settle, a peccary boar presented himself, as though to assure me that his kind were not yet quite banished from the land. I was crawling upon my hands and knees, so as to keep myself concealed from the watchful eyes of the ducks; and this position probably puzzled the boar, for he came sidling up, all the bristles upon his back erected—and that was hunched up into an arch—and all the time he kept gnashing his tushes together, making as much clattering as any half-dozen negro minstrels with 'the bones,' getting closer and closer, and keeping all the while that circling motion which hogs invariably do before they join battle one with another.

My gun was a good, heavy double-barrel, both loaded with a good dose of No. 4 shot; so that I did not feel the least alarmed, and my only anxiety was to get my shot at the ducks with one barrel before I was compelled by my adversary to attend to him, as I knew that at close quarters the load of shot would go through him as solidly as a bullet. So I kept one eye on the ducks, and one upon the boar, and pursued the even tenour of my way. At last I was

within range, and, giving the birds the benefit of one barrel on the water, I sprang to my feet, and with the second, took all the fight out of the peccary boar.

On another occasion, I was hunting on Caney Creek, near to Dr. C.'s plantation, where I was then living. At the time of which I speak, I was in the forest, about half-a-mile distant from the plantation fence, and about a mile from the nearest inhabited building. I was on foot, armed with a single-barrelled rifle and my hunting-knife, and was looking about in some young switch-cane in search of deer,—some venison being wanted for 'the white folks'' table.

In stalking—'still-hunting' it is called in the South—the hunter has to move as silently as possible; and to do this it is necessary to move very slowly, as well as to keep a sharp look-out; for game, owing to the tangled nature of the woods, is not easily to be discovered—so that any movement of the weeds, cane, or bushes, must be quickly noticed, as it may be caused by game. The snap of a dried twig, under the nimble spring of a squirrel, will check a hunter until he satisfies himself what caused it. Moving on in this silent fashion, I noticed the shaking of some slender cane-stems in my front, and, looking closely, caught occasional glimpses of some small, dark object.

Thinking it might be a wild turkey, I paused anxiously, until I could see enough of it to plant a

bullet in what I considered was its body, and then pulled the trigger.

The echoes had hardly caught up the report of my rifle, or the smoke blown clear of my eyes, before, in a dozen directions, the cane-stems were shaking, and I heard the peculiar snapping noise that only peccaries or negro minstrels can make. Knowing it was no time for swapping horses, I bolted with my empty gun for the fence.

By the rustling of the cane-stalks, I soon saw that I was pursued. So, dropping my gun at the foot of the first tree that I thought I could climb, I went up like a squirrel. Before I had gained a comfortable perch, my pursuers were around the root of the tree, where they held an indignation meeting, *à la Américaine*. My first thought was, Well! I hope they'll soon get tired of staying down there! — but as hours went on, and hour by hour slipped by, and still my gaolers showed no symptoms of relaxing their guard, I began to calculate the chances of rescue. I knew that my absence at the dinner-table would cause no uneasiness, as I was oftener in the forest at that hour than not.

Surely, they'll miss me at supper, I thought.

But I got little consolation from that thought, for many an evening was passed down at the lake, fishing, and I, as often as not, boiled my own fish supper in my wigwam.

Thinking thus, I began to wish that I had never missed a single meal in trying to provide food for others, for then, perhaps, my absence would have caused some uneasiness. My next thought was on the hardness of my seat, which at first had felt comfortable enough.

'It's no use my trying to make myself heard at the plantation,' I muttered; 'the wind's dead against me, so I know they can't hear me. Never mind though. Anyhow I'll try. So here goes.'

'House!—house! ahoy!' I roared at the top of my voice; then listened earnestly for a reply. None came.

'What a fool that overseer Marsh is! I wish he was in my place. He knows I came out a-foot; for I told him, when I started, that I was just going to knock over a deer and come in at once. He *ought* to have sense enough to know that something has happened, and ought to come and see what it is.'

I had heard that a Comanche war-whoop could be heard farther than any other kind of yell, from its long quavering notes. I had heard it, when I fancied the Seven Sleepers would have had their slumbers disturbed, as most certainly they would, had they been napping on the war-path. So I determined to try one.

'How-how-poo-oo-oo-oo-ah!' I yelled out; then listened again.

Still no response.

'How-how-poo-oo-oo-oo-ah ah ah!' I shouted out,

giving a few extra quavers towards the last, making the woods ring again with a volume of sound that Lablache might have envied.

'Hilloa!' came back from a long distance off.

'Whoo-whoop!' I answered.

As no response came, I felt satisfied that whoever it was, the stranger was making his way towards me; so I waited patiently, occasionally giving a solitary screech, just to guide my unknown friend.

'Who's that trying to scare all the owls out of the forest?' shouted a voice at a little distance.

'Take care you are not scared yourself, my fine fellow!' I shouted. I'm *treed* by Mexican hogs, and they'll put you to climbing in half-a-second, if you let them catch a glimpse of you.'

'Go back,' I continued, 'go back to the plantation; get every dog you can find; get some people with guns and cane-knives, and come back and use them up.'

'All right!' the voice replied, 'I'll soon be back to you; so sit still.'

The latter advice was quite unnecessary. I had already been 'treed' for fully six hours; and it was not likely, now I was about to be relieved, that I should be so stupid as to come down amongst my vindictive gaolers, to be cut to pieces by them at the eleventh hour.

In about three-quarters of an hour's time, although each minute seemed to be lengthened a quarter of

an hour, and each quarter to half a day, assistance arrived.

Marsh led the advance, with about two-dozen curs, followed by some negroes, armed with cane-knives and bludgeons; and between them all they managed to kill, cripple, or put to flight the peccaries.

I got down the tree by the aid of my hands, my legs being so stiff as to be useless; nor could I reach home without assistance.

The man who had so luckily heard my shouts was the county tax-collector; and this was certainly the first and the only time when the presence of a tax-collector proved welcome to me.

The domestic hog (*Sus scrofa*), whether tame or wild, is of great use in destroying the venomous snakes. They never find one without attempting to kill it, and sometimes, in these encounters, a thin hog will get bitten, and die, but a fat hog rarely suffers, as the fat which receives the venom neutralises it, and it is only when some vein is reached that a snake-bite proves mortal. The hog is an omnivorous feeder. The flesh, from the carrion on which it has fed, is too rank and high-scented to be made use of. Indeed, the hog is quite as good a scavenger as the vulture; for should a horse die in the forest, or a wounded deer or cow escape from the hunter, only to die, the hog puts in an appearance at the feast as early as either the buzzard or wolf.

Though many fall victims to the bears, panthers, and wild cats, yet their numbers are steadily on the increase, for they are very clannish creatures, and fight gallantly in each other's defence. Let one come to grief and scream for assistance, and all within hearing will rally to his aid.

Upon one occasion, I saw a rattlesnake kill a fine porker, but it happened to strike it in the eye. It ran round in a circle, its head rapidly swelling; and at last, in about ten minutes' time, it sank down as though choked, gave two or three quivers, and was dead.

When a hog finds a snake in its wanderings, coiled up ready for attack, it walks round and round its prey several times, giving an occasional grunt, as much as to say, 'You'd better give up quietly, for I mean to have you.' The snake, on its part, knows that the duel will be to the death, and follows each circle of the hog with its eyes, whilst its tongue plays about its mouth like blue lightning. At what he considers the proper instant, the hog rushes in at the snake, presenting his fat jowl to receive the venom; then instantly placing his feet upon the tail or middle of the snake, he shreds the rest of it through his teeth, stripping the flesh from the bone as far as he can draw it. As soon as the snake is dead, the hog makes a meal of it, thus combining business with pleasure.

As nearly two out of every three hogs caught are uneatable, from the filth on which they have fed,

nearly all the planters have pens built in the woods to entrap the wild hogs. The old boars, and others that are worthless, are then destroyed, while the porkers are bound and carried away to the plantation, where they are kept and fed upon corn and proper food until they are killed and salted down for future use.

The hog-pen, a contrivance of the simplest kind, is a square enclosure, of some eight or ten feet wide, the materials of which are large split pieces of timber. The common plantation fence-rails are, however, often used, as these are always eight feet in length. The pen is built some six feet in height, the rails or split trees being laid one upon another at right angles. In one side of the pen is placed a swing-door, which will open only inwards. The pen is baited inside with several ears of Indian corn, a train of grain being laid up to the swing-door.

A herd of hogs, taking their evening stroll, come upon this train of scattered golden maize-grains, which they follow up in hot haste, shoving one another on one side, each striving to secure the largest share. Presently they come to the pen itself, and through the interstices of the rails and the holes in the swing-door they see the rich prize which only awaits the gathering. They are not shy of the rude pen, for they have often tried to force their way through the fence of some Indian corn-field, and have done their prettiest on more than one occasion to rob some corn-crib; so they lose no

time in thrusting their snouts against the pen to seek an entrance. At last one pushes against the door; it yields, and in goes one pig, who begins leisurely to gobble up the corn. This sight makes the others frantic, and they strike and push against the place till each in turn finds the door and gains admittance.

As soon as all the corn is devoured, the door which yielded so easily is again tried. This time it resists all their force; and then, for the first time, it gradually dawns upon their minds that they are trapped. Great is the consternation, and loud the complaints; but all are useless, and the discomfited beasts have to make the best of a bad bargain. The trapper, when he visits the pen on the following morning, finds that he has made a haul, and goes back to the plantation for assistance. A cart is brought, and two or three negroes give their aid. The old boars and useless sows are shot where they stand in the pen; the young porkers, after being subjected to some painful but necessary operations, are carted away, and soon forget, amongst a plentiful supply of corn and pumpkins, their old days of freedom.

An old hunter, towards the close of 1848, was bitten with the California gold-fever, and determined to start across the plains to El Paso, from thence to push his way to the 'diggins;' but before he went he sold his cattle and land, and as he had two or three hundred head of half-wild hogs ranging round the

bayons and swamps which surrounded his lonely wigwam, he determined to invite half-a-dozen hunters to assist him in killing down this stock, which he had decided to convert into pickled pork. The dollars to be made from the sale he expected to find very useful to help him in reaching California.

On the appointed morning, well-mounted and armed with smooth-bores, rifles, and Colt's revolvers, we found ourselves starting for the lagoons, amongst the reeds and flags of which the hogs harboured, and where they frequently fell a prey to alligators. Upon reaching the first reed-bed we fired it, and as the flame drove out the hogs, we shot them as they tried to gain the nearest shelter.

For more than a fortnight we continued this work, each day killing as many of the animals as were fit for the purpose in the forenoon, and afterwards, assisted by seven or eight negroes, we cleaned and salted the pork. Each day, too, the cover became scarcer and scarcer, till at length only one tangled reed-bed was left to be burned, and in this were concealed some of the oldest and fiercest boars.

The old hunter, whose name was Green, warned us that we had better look out for these old fellows; for not only was the ground rotten and fetlock-deep in mud, but the boars were, as he expressed it, 'some considerably riled' at the incessant persecution and disturbance to which they had of late been subjected.

As soon as all had taken their stations, a light was applied to the reed-bed which, fanned by a gentle breeze, soon burnt freely. Here and there, and in a dozen places at once, the tall flags and rushes could be seen shaking, as the hogs retreated before the flames. Gradually, but surely, the tongues of flame licked up the rough jungle, which each moment became more and more contracted.

Occasionally some of the younger and more inexperienced pigs broke from their covert, preferring the chance of being *fired at* to being *fired by* the burning grass; but the older boars clung sullenly to the reeds, and seemed determined to be burnt rather than leave the shelter.

Nearer and nearer came the fire; and as the heat of the burning grass and the crackling of the stout stalks could be more plainly heard, the disturbance in the remaining cover increased. At last, when they could bear it no longer, out rushed the remaining pigs—in number about thirty.

Purvis, an old man of huge frame, was mounted on a small narrow-made pony, which was able, perhaps, to carry its owner's rifle, though not his person. At the time the hogs broke covert he had fixed his eye upon a tremendous boar, and rode to give him the meeting. His rifle-bullet flattened upon the boar's shield (the side-skin over the shoulder and ribs is so called, and in old boars is frequently an inch and a

half in thickness), and quick as thought the hog had upset the pony, and cut him open from chest to thigh. Then suddenly turning upon Purvis, he would most likely have killed him, had not Green perceived his comrade's danger, and stopped the boar with a bullet in his brain.

At this moment one of the party broke the back of a half-grown pig, and its squeals soon gathered its fellows to its assistance, when they 'rallied' around it, their heads fronting outwards, and their gleaming tusks clashing together as they churned the froth which flecked their breasts and shoulders.

Riding round them, we brought our rifles and pistols to bear upon their foreheads, and one after another they were killed. Although this may appear a senseless slaughter, it was in reality a most useful one to the in-coming occupant of the land; for had these, or any of these, wild pigs been left, they would have enticed away the tame stock about to be introduced; but having cleared these useless beasts away, a little attention only was necessary to control their successors and keep them tame.

# CHAPTER X

## THE PUMA, COUGAR, PANTHER.

VULGO, PAINTER; FELIS CONCOLOR—THE LEOPARD-CAT; OCELOT; FELIS PARDALIS.—THE LYNX; BOB-TAILED CAT; BRINDLED CAT; LYNX RUFUS—PRAIRIE WOLF; CANIS LATRANS.—RED TEXAN WOLF; CANIS LUPUS.—THE AMERICAN SKUNK; MEPHITIS CHINGA.

THOUGH not very common now in the Northern States of America or Canada, the Puma, or panther, is yet to be found in considerable numbers in the dense cane-brakes of Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, whilst in the Everglades of Florida it is perhaps as plentiful as ever. The Seminole Indians having been forcibly removed from that State several years ago, the wild animals of those jungly regions have been rarely disturbed by white hunters, and thus have been left to increase in peace.

Naturalists have given the dimensions of the adult puma as being about four feet, or four feet and a half long in the body, and the tail at from two to two and a half feet. These estimates have, probably, been given from the measurements of animals killed in the Northern or Middle States, as in the warmer and more genial climate of the extreme South they often exceed this size. I once saw the skin of a panther which had been

killed on the Trinity River, in Texas, hanging at a shop-door in Galveston, which was said to measure nine feet six inches; and allowing several inches for increase of length, produced by stretching the skin to dry, beyond its living measurement, the animal alive must have measured nearly nine feet.

It is very rare in the South that the largest and most ferocious animals attack man. The warmth of the weather and the abundance of food prevent them suffering the extreme hunger which Northern animals have to endure; but I know of one case in which two panthers did not exercise their usual discretion.

Journeying from Caney Creek, Matagonda County, to the town of Columbia, on the Brazos River, in riding through the forest I shot a turkey, and the nipple of my single rifle blew off at the shoulder. Knowing a planter who lived on the San Bernard Prairie, and whose house was near the road on which I had to travel, I went there, hoping that he could put my useless rifle into shooting order, by drilling out the screw of the broken nipple and putting a new one in. Neither the planter nor his negro blacksmith, however, had tools sufficiently fine to do this, and I had to carry my useless gun to Columbia to be repaired. My host, planter-like, refused to allow me to proceed till I had had some dinner, and my horse had eaten a feed of corn. During my chat with the planter, he jokingly asked me how I should have managed had I been

attacked by a panther in the forest when my gun was empty, saying that the negro-man whom I had seen, had once been attacked by two. The man was called in, and told to take off his shirt, and there—on his breast, and arms, and shoulders, were deep scars, which had been ploughed by the sharp talons of the great American cats. When the negro had left, his master gave me the following account of the encounter. I cannot, of course, at this distance of time, give the words of my host, but this is a tolerably correct account:

Some of S——'s horses had been absent without leave rather longer than they ought to have been, and S—— gave his servant orders to go the first thing in the morning and see if he could not find them, and drive them home. At daylight the negro started, following a 'wood's-road' (a road made for hauling timber along), hoping he might see some 'signs' of the missing horses.

On either side of the road was some 'switch-cane' (the new growth where a fire has burnt down an old cane-brake), and the negro noticed, at one place, that the dewdrops had been brushed from the young cane-stalks by the passage of some animal, and thinking, perhaps, it might be caused by the missing horses, he thought he would follow it.

After following the trail for some ten or fifteen steps, he was horrified to find a large panther stretched in his path, waving its tail from side to side, as a

cat may often be seen to do when pretty secure of its prey. The negro turned to fly, but frightened as he was before, he now despaired when he found that another panther had followed him, and that instead of one beast he had two to contend with. How he reached the road he never could tell, but he did manage to get there, and to seize a stout stanchion that had providentially dropped from some timber-waggon; and with this he beat off the panthers.

He managed also to reach home and tell his master. S—— immediately seized his rifle, called up his hounds with his horn, and started in pursuit of the panthers. His hounds found them, made them 'tree,' and one after the other they fell before S——'s rifle.

By the time my host's story was concluded it was time for me to ride, and, my horse being brought to the verandah, I mounted and started for Columbia, about ten miles distant. When I reached the ferry on the San Bernard River it was nearly sunset, and before the negro ferryman could be found to convey myself and horse across the river, the sun had set below the forest; but as the moon was nearly full and the road, for a forest road, tolerably plain, I held on my way for the town.* About four miles from the ferry I came to a large open space, the dry bed of a large pond, the white sand of which

* There is but little twilight in Texas; in ten minutes after the sun is down, during the winter nights, it is perfectly dark, unless there is a moon, as on this occasion.

the moonbeams lit up, till, in comparison to the dark forest through which I had been riding, the open space seemed almost as light as in the day-time. I ought here to mention that my horse was a light cream-coloured one, called in Texas a 'clay-bank,' and the moment we emerged from the dark forest, I noticed an animal rush towards me from the other side of the pond, the space between us being about one hundred yards. Before the beast had made three long, lithe bounds, I saw that it was a panther, and at the same instant it flashed across my mind that he had mistaken my light-coloured horse for a cow or heifer. With a loaded rifle and my stout hunting-knife, I should have asked no better luck than to try conclusions with the 'painter,' but now, without one bullet to cripple him, I confess I did not so much relish the duel before me. Halting my horse, and standing up in my stirrups, I took my heavy rifle by the barrel, intending to bring it down upon the head of the panther the moment he sprang at my horse, and almost involuntarily I gave the Comanche war-whoop, in tones that would not have disgraced a red-skinned warrior.

It acted like magic. When within ten strides, the fierce beast found out that he had a man instead of having a cow to contend with; he turned at right angles and bounded off into the bush. My horse snorted, and I drew a long breath, as we started once

more for Columbia, which we reached by supper-time, without further adventure.

A friend of mine, living on Caney Creek in Matagorda County, was disturbed one night by the squeaks of an unhappy pig in his orchard. He got out of bed, called his dogs, and taking a rifle, went to see what was the matter. As soon as he came to his peach-orchard, the pig's screams ceased, but his dogs bayed furiously at the roots of two or three trees. As it was too dark to see what the animals were, he returned to his bed, nearly certain that his fierce dogs would keep their victims 'tree'd' till daylight. In the morning it proved to be a panther, with her two half-grown cubs, and my friend succeeded in killing all three. Most likely, had the old panther been alone, she would have made her escape in defiance of the dogs, but being unwilling to leave her cubs, she perished with them.

The Bob-tailed Cat, or Lynx (*Lynx Rufus*), is very common throughout all the Southern States, and is a very cowardly animal, preying chiefly on the wild turkeys in the forest, or upon the small pigs and poultry of the planters. It is rarely seen except late in the evening, or very early in the morning, unless roused from its lair by a pack of cat-dogs, hounds trained to run only panthers, lynxes, and ocelots; and a description of one kind of cat-hunt will serve to show the nature of the sport, whether it be afforded by a bob-tail or a leopard-cat.

Of the Leopard-Cat (*F. Pardalis*) there are two different colours, though this may be accidental; but I have frequently killed, and seen killed, ocelots with black spots upon a dull white-coloured ground; and others with brown or brown-and-black spots on a dingy white or lead-coloured ground. The full-grown ocelot does not stand so high as the lynx, but it is longer—the body, tail, and all, often exceeding four feet in length. It seeks the same kind of food as the lynx, though it is scarcely so daring in its visits to the plantations. Except in this latter characteristic, the habits of all the wild cats are the same.

In the South, in the dense cane-breaks which border most of the southern rivers, the wild cats secure their solitary retreats in which to rear their young. Protected by the tall canes, which intermatted, and woven together by the briars and creeping plants, are almost impenetrable to man or hound, they breed securely; so that, notwithstanding the settling of the country, they remain seemingly as numerous as they ever were. Leaving its young in some natural hole in the ground, or in some hollow tree, it steals forth at early morn, or late at night, and moving as silently as a shadow over the dried leaves, or through the brittle grass, which would rustle at the touch of anything less careful, it seeks it prey. No nest on a tree is secure from them—no burrow in the ground or hollow log uninvaded. The sheepfold, when young lambs are in

season; the porkers and poultry-yard, all the year round, are taxed to supply it with food, and, though many are destroyed, 'the cry is still they come.' If it fails sometimes to surprise the rabbit or opossum in their seats, it can run them down. It springs from tree to tree, or branch to branch, clutching the unsuspecting bird on its perch. Its grace, beauty of motion, whether in pursuit of prey or in play, cannot be exceeded. No attitude is ungraceful—no leap too formidable. Each hair of its body is full of vitality.

No wonder that such an animal is preferred by the Southern hunters to the less agile fox; and even the very hounds hunt it with a more clamorous joy than they do Reynard. At break of day the Southern sportsman blows up with his horn his pack of hounds, who, not kept in kennels as with us, exercise their own discretion as to where they pass the night, and starts off for a cat-hunt. The chase, as may be expected, is varied, and full of amusing incidents, for the cat climbs the trees to baffle pursuit, springing from tree to tree.

The hounds, however—old stagers—are accustomed to this manœuvre, and make wide casts, searching the tree-tops with their eyes, and the ground with their noses, in case the cat, after trying to escape them by passing from one tree to another overhead, should have descended and tried to steal off. When discovered on a tree, it looks down upon the yelling pack with rage and fury; its eyes seem like living balls of fire; its

sharp talons are stretched forth, then retracted, and it scores the insensible wood with deep indentations; its fur bristles up erect; its tail swells; the ears are pressed to the head so flatly that it seems to possess none; and the glistening fangs are exposed as it spits at its enemies. The head in this state resembles very closely in expression, though not in size, that of a rattlesnake.

A poke with a pole, a blow from a stone or lump of clay, or a charge of dust-shot, generally causes it to descend. It is then either worried by the pack, or affords another chase.

The Prairie Wolf (*Canis latrans*), is abundant in Texas. They hunt in packs of from two to six, and a couple, when opening on the track of a deer, will make as much noise as ten couple of hounds. Often, when, tired with a long day's hunt, I have turned in for the night, rolled up in my blankets, under some tree, I have been kept awake for an hour, or two, by their yelling, and sometimes, when the sharp yelps have been softened by distance and I have not been disposed for sleep, I have listened to their cry with pleasure, as it has recalled good runs over the great grass fields of Northamptonshire or Leicestershire. There is no uniformity in the colour of these wolves, and I have frequently seen cubs, in the same litter, of three different colours, black, brown, and yellow.

They are in no case dangerous to man, being

cowardly creatures, and too well fed by fawns caught in the spring, and fat bucks in the autumn—hares and wild turkeys during the rest of the year—ever to get very ravenous.

As I knew them to be so destructive to game, I used to carry with me a bottle of strychnine, with which I 'doctored' all the offal of my game, and I have killed as many as five prairie wolves with the head, neck, and entrails of one deer. In America there is, or at least was, no restriction as to the sale of poisons, the government wisely considering that if a person was foolish enough to wish to destroy himself, the sooner he did so the better.

Occasionally I have known the prairie wolf run down by a horseman, and its brains dashed out with the stirrup. But it is killing work for the horse.

Red Texan Wolf (*Canis Lupus*). This wolf, though found in several other States, has been named the red Texan wolf, for no other reason apparently, than that, as the prairies of Texas are larger than are the 'grass seas' of other States, so this, being a prairie wolf, is therefore more numerous there than elsewhere.

The Gray Fox (*Vulpes Virginianus*), is the only fox I have seen in Texas, and I believe it is the only one found in the extreme South, though many red foxes are to be found in Georgia and the Carolinas. I have seen as many as three killed in one morning's hunt on the Yegua (Mare) River, close to Independence,

Washington county, Texas, by the hounds of a Mr. Cooper, who lived there.

The gray fox, when much pressed by the hounds, will 'tree' as readily as a cat. In America everything seems to 'tree,' or perch—quail, grouse, snipes, and lastly, foxes.

As cat-hunting has seldom been participated in by English sportsmen, I shall recall a hunt at which I took a part.

In the sunny South, when cat-hunting is the order of the day, the meet is always fixed a little before daybreak, as the trail is then hot amongst the dewy grass, where the cat has been prowling about. Very often a fox is found first; but, as sport is the object, it does not much matter what animal shows it, whether catamount, leopard-cat, panther, or fox; and sometimes one, or more, of each kind is killed.

One of the best morning's sport I ever had with cats was on the Trespalacios Creek. This stream was then without a single settlement upon it, from its mouth to its source; and, being heavily timbered, was a harbour for game, animals, and vermin of all kinds. Once, perhaps, in three or four years, some half-dozen hunters would go for a fortnight's camp-hunt, and pitch their camp upon its banks—its bright waters abounding in fish, whilst in the woods, animals of every kind common to Texas could be found, from a wild bull to a ground squirrel, from a turkey to a quail.

A weary ride of thirty miles brought our little party to the Trespalacios Creek. The ride was tiresome—not from the distance, but from the snail's-pace at which we were compelled to travel, as we had an ox-waggon with us filled with casks and sacks of salt; for we intended to combine business with pleasure, and save the best of the meat we hoped to kill.

The four yoke of sturdy oxen hauled the huge Osnaburgh covered waggon at less than three miles an hour over the prairie, whilst three other hunters and myself slowly piloted the three negroes, who took it turn about to drive the team; the two off duty—negro fashion—passing their time asleep in the bed of the waggon, together with half the pack of hounds, who also rode in their turns.

The negroes were brought to attend to the hoppled oxen when we should arrive at the camping-ground, as well as to the skinning of the animals we might kill, and the salting of the meat, which we intended to preserve.

Although we had started at about three o'clock in the morning, it was nearly sundown by the time we reached the spot determined upon for our camping-ground. Most of our arrangements had thus to be made by the light of an immense fire; and though we worked hard and fast, it was late before our suppers were ended, and our hounds fed; so that after one pipe, and a tin pannikin of grog, we were all glad to stretch ourselves upon our blankets, and get to sleep.

Ben K——, the owner of most of the hounds, was not a man likely to oversleep himself, or forget any business he might have on hand, especially when that business was hunting. None were therefore surprised, though one or two felt rather surly, when five or six blasts upon Ben's horn set all the hounds howling, and roused us all most effectually from the land of dreams.

'There is no time to lose,' said Ben, as soon as we were wide awake. 'The sun'll be up a'most before we are ready mounted; so saddle up, and get your shooting-irons in trim. You can eat a bite of biscuit as we ride along, and I needn't say you can take a nip of whisky as well in the saddle as on foot, for I know there is not one in this crowd that couldn't drink if he was set on his head, or leastways try.'

Urged thus to hurry ourselves, we were not long in getting ready for the business and sport which had cost us so much toil the day before; for, to compel yourself to crawl along like a snail, when you have the means to finish your journey in a quicker manner, is one of the most tiresome of annoyances to a hunter, especially with a broiling sun overhead; and the day before I had envied some of the hounds, who had been able to travel under the shadow of the waggon.

To look at the hounds on this morning, however, there were no signs remaining of their tired appearance, for they capered around our horses, evidently eager for the fun.

'Look out, "painter," cat, or bar!' said Ben, when he saw all were ready for the sport; 'I guess this team 'll make you stir your pads if they come across the trail of any of you, and we've got the barking-tools to back them up in any of their undertakings.'

Following the sandy margin of the Creek, we rode slowly forward, the hounds scattering themselves about in the forest, though two or three old stagers followed the water-line as though they were looking for 'sign,' independent of their noses, and expected to see where some cat had been to drink.

Suddenly, at the same instant, one of the hounds at some distance in the forest gave a long yell, as though he had come across something that was very nice, just as one of the old stagers opened at the edge of the water, and, having paused one instant, as though to make sure that it was no false alarm, he dashed off in full cry towards the other hound who had challenged; and speedily the woods rang to the full chorus of the united pack.

'Let's see what it is,' said Ben K——, as he dismounted, and gave his horse to hold, whilst he went down on his knees to inspect the ground more closely by the still indistinct light of the early day.

'Its a cat! the "sign" is as round as an orange,' he said, as he rose from his knees. 'I was somewhat in hopes it might be a "painter," just for a beginner.'

Luckily, a cat does not take a line, and run straight away, for otherwise the pack must have run clean out of hearing, and the one before them seemed rather to try and throw them off the scent by tree-climbing, and springing from one tree to another, than to outpace the hounds, and so escape. A prolonged baying, at length, told us that the cat had at last 'treed,' or had sought some refuge from its pursuers; and when we arrived, we found that it had gone to earth, under the root of a large live oak tree.

Our presence gave new courage to the dogs, and one ventured to poke his head, and half his body, into the hole. A scream of agony instantly succeeded, and told us that the plucky hound had caught a Tartar; and his struggles to escape and draw back were wonderful. At last, he managed to tear loose, emerging with his ears and shoulder scratched to ribbons, and giving plain evidence that claws and teeth had done their work. Without heeding the warm reception given to his companion, another stunted little hound forced his way into the hole.

A mingled noise of howling and cat-swearing succeeded this new attack, and Ben K—— dismounting, forced his gauntleted hand under the dog's belly, and thrusting his arm as far up as he could, caught the cat by the throat, and dragged back both hounds and varmint. The cat hung on to the dog until it discovered the rest of his enemy's friends, when it

loosed its hold, and tried to escape; but the other dogs instantly closed, and the cat was literally 'chawed up' in no time.

Taking the pack to the Creek where the wounded could bathe their hurts and refresh themselves, we gave them ten minutes' breathing time before we started to look for a fresh quarry. The second 'treed,' and was shot after a short run, as was the third; but the fourth fairly got away from us, either by springing from tree to tree for a long distance, or else by walking a grape vine which spanned the Creek high up, where it stretched from tree-top to tree-top on either side; but how it was done we never knew precisely, and as by this time the sun had got too hot for hunting, we returned tired and hungry to camp, where the negroes had prepared some hot coffee and broiled rashers, to which we did full justice.

One of those little pests it is impossible for the hunter to guard against, is the American Skunk, (*Mephitis Chinga.*) Few people who have hunted long in the South have failed to make the acquaintance of this animal, and strangers who have unwittingly attacked him have had cause, for many a day, to rue their onslaught. Dogs, who do not know its qualities, attack it, expecting an easy victory, and even some dogs who have previously caught a Tartar, are anxious to avenge past grievances, and 'pitch in' to be again discomfited.

I was once quail-shooting in Washington County, Texas, and was, as usual, mounted on my shooting pony. My pointer stood in some rough grass, and as some quail had settled there or thereabouts—and I knew how closely they often lay—I made my horse trample the grass. All at once I saw it was a skunk, and before I could wheel my pony out of harm's-way, the skunk saluted his forelegs and breast with the contents of the glands under its tail, and for three weeks afterwards my horse had a rest—so foully was it scented.

Long afterwards, in Brazoria County, two or three friends and myself were 'driving deer' with hounds. After killing a deer or two, H——, the master of the hounds, said he would 'drive' another part of the forest. As we rode along, H—— observed a skunk, and, fearful that it might injure the hounds by destroying their scenting powers, he jumped down to shoot it, and cast it with a stick into a thicket. The skunk was not quite dead when H—— tried to put in practice the last part of his plan; and in its expiring efforts it threw some of its secretion upon H.'s nether garments. On our return at night, Mrs. H——, who had prepared a sumptuous backwoods' dinner for the party, smelt the inexpressibles, and, turning to her husband, desired him to turn out the dog which had been killing a skunk; for the good woman supposed that—

'The staghounds, weary of the chase,'

had wandered in as usual to the dining-room. H—— replied that he was 'the only person, he supposed, who had killed a skunk,' and that he hoped she did not 'consider him a dog.'

He took the hint, however, and left to change his clothes; but it was many a day before he ceased to perfume with his presence his own house, his fields, and, for fifty-yards round, any place where he was standing for a few minutes.

Hundreds of stories are told of greenhorns who have been thus scented; and I have known scores of instances where people who knew all about them have been caught at night, when incautiously they have gone to the protection of their fowls, &c.

# CHAPTER XI.

## THE VIRGINIAN OPOSSUM.

DIDELPHYS VIRGINIANA.

*Characteristics.*—Head long, conical; muzzle pointed; ears large, almost naked; tail long, scaly; the female furnished with a pouch containing thirteen mammæ, arranged in a circle, with one in the centre.

*Description.*—Body stout and clumsy; mouth wide; moustaches on sides of the face, and a few over the eyes, which are high up in the forehead. Nails of moderate length and curved. Inner toe on hind feet without nails, and opposable to others, so as to form a hand. The fur is of two kinds; a soft woolly hair next the skin, with an outer coat of longer hairs, which are not long enough to conceal the under covering.

*Colour.*—Face near the snout pure white; ears blue. Hair on upper portion of the body is white at the base and black at the tips; the long hairs are mostly white; a line of dark brown beginning on the forehead widens towards the shoulders. The feet are brownish black, sometimes of a dark red tinge; the tail is brown.

*Dimensions.*—From point of nose to root of tail sixteen inches; tail twelve inches.

*Weight.*—Averages twelve pounds.

NOT only are deer 'fire-hunted' with an old frying-pan filled with pitch-pine knots, but there are several small animals which, being nocturnal in their

habits, are rarely killed in the daytime. These are hunted chiefly by young white lads upon the plantations for the fun of it, and by the negroes for the fun and meat together.

Now and then some very enthusiastic hunter condescends to bring his knowledge of woodcraft to bear upon those inferior animals, the racoon and opossum; but this is only the case where the hunting instinct is very strong indeed—so strong that it would lead a salmon-fisher to fish for sticklebacks in a brook if deprived of his more noble pursuit.

The opossum is one of the most singular and inexplicable little animals existing. In length of body it is from twelve to fifteen inches, and the tail is about as much more; the tail looks like that of a huge rat, and is destitute of hair. The hair of the body is grey, white, and brown, and this mixture gives it generally a blue tinge. The ears are thin and crumpled, and look very much like two little bits of a blue kid glove, and are also bare of hair. The feet are naked and long, and have a peculiar hand-like appearance. The eyes are very prominent, and as there are no eyelids worth mentioning, they have the appearance of two black beads stuck on the face. These are not very powerful by daylight, and even bright moonlight nights seem too much for them, as very often they are perceived and killed before they seem to know that anyone is near them. The jaws are long and furnished with

formidable-looking teeth, but they lack the power to use the latter strongly. Its greatest peculiarity is its pouch, and this has attracted general attention. The pouch is under the belly, and in it the young are carried before they are completely developed, and afterwards they retreat to it when threatened with danger. This singular pocket contains ten, twelve, or thirteen teats in its interior, to which the young are attached after what seems a premature birth, and to these they hang for about fifty days. At the end of this period they drop off, and begin to lead a more active life.

If the animal is put in a critical situation, he will resort to stratagem rather than force to elude his pursuers, and if he finds escape impossible, he will feign death, hoping thereby to escape the threatened danger; and even if, knowing the cunning of the animal, the hunter should administer several deadly blows, and think that he had really destroyed him, he will watch his opportunity, and, unexpectedly recovering his breath, effect his escape. So well known is this trick that it has given rise to the well-known saying, when anyone is doing anything deceptive, that he is 'playing 'possum.'

Take an opossum in good health, corner him up until escape is impossible, then give him a gentle tap on the body that would hardly crush a mosquito, and he will straighten out and be, according to all indication, perfectly dead. In this situation you may thump him,

cut his flesh, and half skin him—not a muscle will he move: his eyes are glazed and covered with dust, for he has no eyelids to close over them. You may even worry him with a dog, and satisfy yourself that he is really defunct; then leave him quiet a moment, and he will draw a thin film from his eyes, and, if not interfered with, be among the missing.

A favourite simile with many of the uneducated backwoods preachers is the tenacity with which the opossum can suspend himself by his tail. We once heard a preacher enforce the necessity of perseverance and good works, by comparing a true Christian to a 'possum up a tall sapling, in a strong wind. Said he: 'My brethren, that's your situation exactly. The world, the flesh, and the devil compose the wind, that is trying to blow you off the Gospel tree. But don't let go of it; hold on as a 'possum would in a hurricane. If the fore-legs of your passions get loose, hold on by your hind-legs of conscientiousness; and if they let go, hold on eternally by your tail, which is the promise that the saints shall persevere unto the end.'

I was once on a visit to a planter who loved hunting passionately. He had killed hundreds of buffaloes on the western plains, bears in the Mississippi bottoms, and panthers in the cane-brakes of Texas and Arkansas. Nothing was too big for him, nothing too small. On one occasion I happened to speak slightingly of 'possum-hunting.

'Pardon me,' said my host, 'it is neither the size of the animal nor its value which gives me a zest for the sport; it is because very few, perhaps none but myself, have ever taken it into their heads to shoot opossums on a dark night, and with a rifle.'

'On a dark night, and with a rifle?' I said.

'Yes; the darker the better. To-night I will convince you, if you choose.'

The night was 'as black as a wolf's throat,' and I could not help muttering to myself that 'I should as soon expect to "catch a hare with a drum" as to shoot a rifle successfully in such black darkness.' My remark was overheard, and the reply was, 'They who live longest will see the most!'

Preceded by a negro with a torch, who piloted us into the depths of the forest, we soon got about a mile away from the house; and then the dogs, for we had two of them, were encouraged to hunt about. Before many minutes had passed, they gave notice that a 'possum was afoot, and presently they had 'treed' it. Of course, seeing was out of the question, and we could only, led by our ears, follow our noses, till we came to the tree, at the foot of which, with their noses high in the air, the dogs were dancing around and 'barking up the right tree.'

The darkness seemed to thicken each moment, and I was fairly puzzled to tell how the game was to be got at. Had a brick wall intervened, the tree tops

would have been just as visible; and as we had no axe, I was at a loss to understand what was the next thing to be done. Not so my companion; for, taking his torch, the negro soon collected a huge pile of brush and logs, which he placed at about forty feet from the base of the tree, at whose foot the dogs were so merrily barking, and set it on fire. As soon as the fire began to sparkle and crackle fiercely, my friend, requesting me to follow, went to the further side of the tree, and, seating himself about fifteen yards off the tree, requested me to seat myself just behind him, he having the trunk of the tree upon which was the varmint between himself and the huge brushwood fire. The fire continued to burn each moment more brightly, and the tree that intervened between us and it became more prominent, and its outline more distinct, until the most minute branch and leaf was perfectly visible.

'Now,' said my host, 'follow with your eye the trunk of the tree, up one side and down the other, and then look on the branches, and see if you can discover anything that looks like an excrescence upon any of them.'

'Is not that something about three parts up, between the large branch on the right side and the one next it?'

'There is something there, but I do not think it large enough for our game,' said my companion.

Nevertheless, he raised his rifle, sighted, pulled the

trigger, and waited the result. Down came thundering some heavy fragments of a knot. The negro picked them up, and pitched them disdainfully into the fire. Again my host raised his weapon, and, sighting at a large protuberance, pulled the trigger. The shot struck true and fair enough, for another large knotty piece of wood was again shivered, but no 'possum fell. This time the tree was scanned more closely, and a large bundle discovered, which I had passed my eyes carelessly over as a bunch of Spanish moss, and, from its close resemblance to that parasitical plant, my friend, too, had, I believe, been of the same opinion. This time he either saw some movement or something whispered to him that it was the little beast, for he again put up his gun and covered the object. This time the report was followed by a grunt worthy of a pig, and a dull, heavy thud, as a compact body struck the ground. This time it was the 'possum.

The negro threw the opossum across his shoulder, rekindled the torch, which after lighting the fire he had extinguished, and led the way out of the forest towards home.

The opossum, however, is seldom hunted thus scientifically, and only lads and negroes hunt him for the sake of his carcase. By the 'darkies' it is highly valued: they look upon it as the very choicest meat; and when ''possum fat and 'tater' can be procured, they pass by venison and wild turkey with scorn. And

never is a negro happier than when he shoulders his axe at night, and whistles up the curs, who call him master, to have a 'possum-hunt. Fine nights, when the moon shines, are generally chosen. The dog or dogs try round the cornfields, and rarely go far before they find the trail of one, which they presently force to climb a tree. A torch is then lit, by the light of which the beast is discovered, and the axe plied. Blow after blow falls on the devoted tree, which, whether a century old or merely a sapling, soon falls, and with it the game.

The dogs, who, whilst the tree has been being felled, have kept their eyes upon the animal, *nail* it as it touches the ground, where, finding escape hopeless, it simulates death, and this between the cunning negroes and their dogs is converted into a real one.

# CHAPTER XII.

## THE RACOON.

PROCYON LOTOR.—URSUS LOTOR.

*Characteristics.*—Muzzle long and pointed, projecting beyond the lower jaw; ears short, oval; tail long and bushy. The feet have five toes, with strong nails, which are not retractile; the soles of the hind feet naked.

*Description.*—The body of robust build, legs of moderate length. The body is thickly covered with two kinds of hair, the inner being soft and of a woolly character, while the outer is long and close.

*Colour.*—The upper part of the body greyish, mixed with black; ears, lips, chin, dingy white; above the eyes a light grey tint prevails. A dark patch passes over the eyes and nose, fading gradually; eyes black; on the sides and belly the long hairs are dingy white. The tail has five or six black rings alternating with bands of light yellowish brown.

*Size.*—Length from nose to root of tail twenty-six inches; length of tail nine inches; breadth of head four inches and a quarter.

*Weight.*—Averages twenty pounds.

THE English fox-hunter, seeing the racoon at some distance, might mistake it for the 'pug' often chased over the great Leicestershire and Northampton-

shire pastures, and in thought he would recross the Atlantic, and imagine himself in the Harborough country, but a closer inspection would soon dispel the illusion. The familiar 'brush' would be found unlike the black-tipped and ringed tail of the 'coon. In its taste for food it resembles the fox even more nearly than it does in shape. It likes flesh and fowl, green or ripe corn and fruits, and could keep a Lent on fish and eggs without doing a very disagreeable penance. It has one great advantage over the English fox, and it greatly excels the climbing qualities of the American fox: it can climb a tree as quick as a wild cat.

In the South, and on the sea-coast especially, the 'coon almost lives upon turtle-eggs, oysters, and mussels. He watches the turtle deposit her eggs in the sand, and then quietly digs them up and devours them. When the oyster-beds are left dry, or nearly dry, by low tides, he preys upon the bivalves. Unhappy fish left by the tide in shallows are fished for and eaten. Concealed by the rushes or flags or tall grass on the margin of river, pond, or lake, he watches for any waterfowl which may come within his reach, and he rarely misses his spring. When the Indian corn is *tasselling*, the racoon is aware of the fact as soon as the planter, and his visits are as constant as they are undesired. In the interior it frequents the rivers and creeks, hunting their edges for fresh-water shellfish or whatever it can secure, and seeking for frogs,

especially the great bull-frog. Birds' nests are taxed too, to supply the racoon with food; and of all birds perhaps the wild turkey suffers most, as she approaches her nest on foot, and is thus easily followed by the keen nose of her enemy, whilst most other birds reach theirs by aid of their wings, and thus leave no traces in the air. But even with this advantage the birds are not safe, for the racoon hunts out their nests amongst the branches of the trees.

The racoon is a favourite dish amongst the negroes and a few rough backwoodsmen, though it is not nearly so much esteemed as a fat opossum. I have twice, when out of ammunition and many a mile from 'anywhere,' caught a racoon and tried to eat some of it, but I never could manage more than a morsel or two, and I must be far hungrier than I ever yet was to make a meal of one. I would almost as soon try to eat a fox.

Although on the prowl during the greater part of the night, it may often be seen in the daytime also. I was once 'still-hunting,' or stalking deer, in the forest on the San Bernard river in Texas, when I saw a racoon upon the ground about forty yards from me. Expecting to get a shot at deer every minute, I should not have wasted a charge from my rifle upon it, but as soon as it saw me, it came forward, showing its teeth, and bristling up its fur, evidently bent upon giving me a 'fight or a footrace.' As soon as I became fully satisfied of its intentions, I shot it.

No animal, not even excepting the wild cat, will fight harder or quicker than a racoon; and I have seen thrice, in one afternoon, three female 'coons in quick succession 'whip,' to use a Yankeeism, three large bear-dogs.

When at Virginia Point, on the mainland, and seven miles distant from the city of Galveston on the island of that name, I mounted my pony one afternoon to drive the *chapparal* which borders Galveston West Bay, intending to shoot whatever turned up, from a deer to a flapper of the dusky duck (*Anas obscura*), which breeds in Texas. When a couple of miles from home, I turned the dogs into the chapparal. In a few minutes I heard a tremendous row, and upon riding in I found them engaged in a fierce fight with a racoon. The struggle lasted more than half-an-hour, and half-a-dozen times I thought the life had been bitten or shaken out of the *varmint*, but after lying to all appearances lifeless for a minute or two, whilst the dogs stood panting around, the vixen would suddenly get on her legs and attack the dogs like a fury. As soon as I could, I shot the racoon, to put her out of her misery, and in a few moments afterwards one of the dogs routed out of a tussock of grass five young 'coons only a day or two old.

Three hundred yards beyond the spot where this encounter happened, another vixen was found, and another fight occurred very similar to the first, and

on its conclusion four young ones were found and killed.

Shortly after another was found. Again as sharp a fight ensued, and when it was ended, a nest of five more was discovered, but as I was close by when the dogs found them, I whipped them back and saved the young 'coons. I carried them home, fed them on milk for a few days, and hoped to raise them, but they died about a week after they came into my possession.

On the road between Brazoria and Columbia, on the Brazos river, I found a racoon playing in the topmost branches of a tall elm when I was returning home one morning from a successful cattle-hunt. I halted my horse, and raising my gun sent a bullet at its shoulders. The ball struck rather lower than I intended, and only broke the fore-arm, but as it was an ounce bullet, and from a smooth-bore, the shock knocked the racoon out of the tree, and it fell into the jaws of the stout cattle-dogs. They expected to make short work of the little beast, but they reckoned wrongly, for more than once did the 'coon fight clear of its enemies, but in the end they proved too much for it, and it was killed.

Whenever I had been hunting, and had not overloaded my horse with game, if I killed a racoon, I generally managed to carry it home as a present to my negro groom, who valued it nearly as highly as if it was a 'possum.

When I first went to Texas, I have often made one at

a ''coon-hunt' on a plantation. At night, after the whole day's work was over, the negroes, and perhaps some of the white boys, would call up the dogs, and proceed around the Indian cornfields, two or three of the negroes carrying axes. One or other of the dogs would generally open soon on the warm scent of a 'coon, and the others joining in, they would compel the animal to take a tree, where they would bay him till the breathless negroes could run up. Then on the still night air would ring out the stroke of the axe as the negroes made the chips fly. Under their sturdy strokes the tree would soon fall, and with it the racoon, and the dogs generally made short work with him.

As soon as this racoon was secured, the negroes would continue their hunt in search of a fresh one, and very often five or six of these animals, with, maybe, an opossum or two as well, would reward their night's labours. One night I was encamped on the banks of the Brazos river, and, rolled in my blankets under a live-oak tree, I was sleeping the sleep of a tired hunter when I was wakened towards midnight by some curious sounds over head. The night was beautiful, the moon at the full and high in the heavens, and searching the branches of the live-oak by aid of its light, I discovered two large racoons, either fighting or making love; for they were kicking up a row that two cats on the tiles might have envied. My heavy shot gun was by my

side, both barrels loaded with buck-shot, and picking it up, I pulled the trigger of my right-hand barrel, and brought both racoons dead to the ground.

When taken very young and brought up, the racoon makes both an amusing and attached companion. One of these animals made many voyages on a coasting-ship which plied between Galveston and New York, and even when blind with age, he could find his way amongst the rigging as well as the sailors themselves, and he never failed to make his appearance at the meals both of the captain aft and the sailors forward. Besides being hunted and slain, many hundreds are caught in traps. In the South but few of the skins are exported, most of them being used for caps, ammunition-bags, &c. The rugs made of the skins of this animal with the tails attached, which we see so frequently in carriages, are mostly obtained from the North, where the fur is thicker and heavier than in the South.

# CHAPTER XIII.

## THE WILD TURKEY.

MELEAGRIS GALLOPAVO.

*Description.*—Head small, flattened above, with a pendulous caruncle on the forehead; bill short, slightly arched, rather obtuse; neck bare and beset with a series of irregular caruncles; a tuft of long bristles, pendant from the upper part of the breast; the body robust; feet long and strong; a conical obtuse spur on the tarsus, about two-thirds down; wings shortish, convex, and rounded; tail long, ample, and rounded, capable of being erected and expanded in a permanent manner when the bird is excited.

*Colour.*—The skin of the head and neck various tints of blue and purple; upper part of the back and wings yellowish brown, with metallic lustre, changing to deep purple; the truncated tips of the feathers broadly margined with velvet black; the lower part of the back and the tail coverts are deep chestnut, banded with green and black; the under parts are duller; the legs and toes bright purplish red, claws brown.

*Size.*—Four feet one inch in length; extent of wings five feet eight inches; middle toe five, hind toe two inches; pectoral appendage ten or eleven inches.

*Weight.*—The 'gobblers,' as the male birds are termed, weigh from eighteen to thirty pounds, the hens from fourteen to eighteen pounds.

OF all birds which in America are considered game, the largest is the wild turkey. It is the national

bird, truly indigenous, and, in the opinion of Benjamin Franklin, should have been the American emblem.

This splendid bird is found over all the North American continent, though it does not exist (in a wild state) south of the Isthmus of Darien. Four varieties are known, without including the wattled turkey (*Tallegalla*) of Australia. Of these, the first on the list is the American turkey, which, though in times past abundant through all the Eastern States, is now very rare except in the South and West. Arkansas and Texas are the great nurseries of the turkey, though many are still found in Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, where, in all probability, they will find refuge for many years to come in the cane brakes and tangled forests which abound in those States.

In the high table-lands of Mexico, and in the Rocky Mountain regions, is found the Mexican turkey. Having never seen this bird, I cannot describe it; but it is said to differ materially in many points from the first-named bird.

The ocellated turkey of Central America is third on the list, and this bird possesses almost as gaudy a plumage as the peacock, its neck, breast, and body flashing in the sunshine with tints of green, purple, and gold.

Last of all comes the common or domestic turkey, a variety which in all probability has been kept in a domesticated state for ages, as is supposed to be

the case with fowls, ducks, cattle, sheep, pigs, and other animals which are kept by man for pleasure or profit.

It has, indeed, been stated that the Spaniards found a domestic turkey in the possession of the inhabitants of Mexico and the West Indian Islands; and if such be the case, it will go far to prove that the domestic turkey is a distinct species from the wild. The experiment has often been tried of hatching wild turkey eggs under barn-door fowls; but the young birds always strayed away into the forests, preferring to remain with their own kindred rather than with the foster-mother provided by the experimentalists.

The domestic turkey—no matter where or by whom bred—is in every respect inferior to his wild kinsman of the forest. Even in America, where it is suffered to roam about the fields at pleasure, almost without restraint, it is in no respect better than the inhabitant of a European poultry yard. Crosses sometimes occur;—such being the influence of slavery, even upon birds, that in remote settlements the robust gobbler from the forest will drive his degenerate kinsmen from their females, and even from their food. The produce of such commixtures is much esteemed.

A person who has seen the turkey only in the poultry yards can form no idea of the splendour of a wild bird in full plumage. An untamed zebra from the desert, and a Blackheath donkey at the end of

Easter week, would scarcely present a greater contrast than the wild turkey when placed by the side of the tame. Every look, every motion, betokens health and purity of blood; his well-formed game-looking head stands at least four feet from the ground; he has none of the dull, stupid look of the domestic bird, but his bright hazel eye is full of fire, intelligence, and suspicion; his step is clean and firm, while the greater breadth of shoulder and depth of chest must strike the most casual observer.

The head and neck of the wild turkey is generally of a darker blue than in the tame species; the tuft on the breast sometimes measures nearly a foot in length. I have one by me which measures nearly ten inches; the bird upon which it grew, and which I killed, weighed thirty pounds. Hunters have often spoken of heavier birds—some have stated that they have killed birds weighing as much as forty pounds. This I do not think improbable, though it has never been my fortune to meet such a fine specimen.*

Towards the end of February the settler in the woods of Texas will, if the weather is mild, be roused from his slumbers before daybreak by the cheery cries of the turkey cocks, and the responsive clucking of the hens,

* Estimated weights I do not care to quote: wherever weights are given they may be relied on, as I superintended the weighing. There is at 'The Field' office the beard of a 'gobbler' which I killed, that weighed thirty pounds.

as they salute each other from the summits of cypress and magnolia trees. They commence at early dawn, and continue till sunrise. Every morning, in the months of March and April, the forests ring with these sounds; but towards the end of the latter month the clucking of the hen ceases, as she is then compelled to separate herself from her lord and master, in order to save the eggs, which he would certainly break if he could discover them.

By this time, too, the 'gobblers' seem worn out with their amorous duties; they no longer fight furious battles with rivals, their breast sponge becomes flat, and they cease to gobble. They separate from the hens, and retire into the densest part of the woods. During the summer months, indeed, they are so thin and emaciated that they are seldom shot at; and the Indians say of a very thin man that he is 'As poor as a turkey in summer.'

The hens generally lay their eggs in April, and make their nest in some retired spot, where it will be as much as possible concealed from wild cats and other vermin, as well as from the cock bird, who never by any chance neglects to break the eggs if he can discover them, nor to split open the skulls of the young chicks with his powerful beak.

Although the spot is chosen with a view to concealment, the turkey hen generally places her nest on the outskirts of the forest, near the open prairie and a

stream or pool of water, to which during the process of incubation she makes two or three visits a day—at morning, noon, and evening.

Prairie sloughs, which jut out some distance from the main timber into the prairie, are favourite nesting places, as she can then steal from her nest undetected by the gobblers, keeping under shelter of the straggling timber, and in the same manner regain her nest and sit peacefully, the poor males being by this time so thoroughly tattered and seedy in appearance that they hide their poverty-stricken looks in the thickest parts of the forest.

The eggs are of a dull cream colour, plentifully dotted with red. The hen generally lays about a dozen, and during the time thus occupied, as well as while incubating, she is extremely cautious in her movements, taking a fresh path every time she leaves or approaches the nest, and piling a quantity of leaves and rubbish on the eggs, so as to hide them from the eye.

When the chickens leave the shell they are very small, and their covering is more hairy than the down which clothes the backs of tame turkey chicks. They are rather an unruly brood, for instead of obeying the mother's voice, they run into the forest with such obstinacy that they may be said to lead her, rather than she lead them: this only continues for a day or two. If the weather be rainy immediately after hatching, the

young turkeys perish very fast, although, according to Audubon, the mother physics them with the buds of the spice-wood bush.* In a dry season they grow apace, insect food being at such times plentiful; and at the end of three weeks the young birds are able to take their perches at night on the low branch of a tree.

During the day they will stray out into the prairies in search of insects, strawberries, dewberries, or blackberries, and by the time October comes they are nearly full grown and independent of the maternal authority.

The hens have recovered their flesh which they had lost by sitting, the gobblers have regained their plumpness by feeding upon nuts, grapes, and a thousand and one good things picked up in the forest. When all are fat and strong they gradually form themselves into flocks, or *gangs* as the forest settlers and hunters call them, frequently as many as a hundred birds being in one group. This feathered 'gathering of the clans' has given the Indians their name for the month of October, which they call 'Turkey month.'

In districts where mast is plentiful, they devour all before them, clearing the ground and roaming over a great extent of country. When one part of the wood is exhausted they immediately move on to some other place where acorns and peccan nuts are more plentiful. At such times they rarely rise from the ground, unless

* This may be doubted, but it is very probable that the young eat naturally the wild *bird-pepper*, which grows everywhere.

for the purpose of crossing a river, or when they have been flushed by the hunter's dog.

The crossing of a wide river is a great undertaking with the turkeys; they sometimes spend a whole day on the banks of the stream, holding a high-pressure parliament to consider the dangers and difficulties of the attempt. The males strut about with fans spread and wings brushing the ground, gobbling and calling to each other, and doing all they can to inspire the hens and young birds with the courage necessary for such an expedition into the air. When at length they have screwed up their courage to the flying point, the noisy crowd adjourns to the top of the highest tree at hand, where they sit for a time, stretching out their necks towards the distant shore, as though they were endeavouring to estimate the distance and the length of time to be occupied in crossing. At length, when all seem to have gathered breath, one of the old birds gives the word of command, and they all take wing. There is always a descent in their flight, so that if the river they are crossing be very wide, few out of the number will reach land on the opposite side without wetting their feathers; very few, however, of those that drop into the water perish, for they can swim a little by spreading their tails on the wave, and striking out with their feet. When they reach shore they are so exhausted and bedraggled as to be almost incapable of motion, and consequently fall an easy prey to lynxes, wolves, and

wild cats, for these 'varmint' are wide awake, and, knowing full well the meaning of the incessant outcry which has been going on for a day or two on the opposite side, are on the look out for waifs and strays. If there be a squatter or hunter in the neighbourhood he too will be on the look out, and, judging from past experience whereabouts the birds will alight on his side of the stream, will take measures accordingly, and manage to secure a good number of them.

During the autumn and winter the turkeys remain together in these flocks. In February, as before mentioned, they begin to experience the impulse of propagation.

The wild turkey seems filled with the instinct of self-preservation, being the shyest and wariest of all game found in the American continent. In districts where the foot of hunter has rarely trod, and where, consequently, the birds are comparatively unmolested, he who goes in pursuit of them must possess some knowledge of the habits of the bird and its usual haunts if he hopes for success. But where the haunts of the turkey are surrounded by plantations, they become so wild, from being so frequently hunted, that it is almost impossible for the hunter to get within gunshot. Only a veteran in the art has any chance of success. It is recorded of an old hunter that he once chased a turkey regularly for three years, only catching sight of the bird twice, although he used the 'call' with which they

imitate the cry of the female, and so allure the cock within range of the rifle. But let him relate his adventures himself.

'I always hunted that ar' gobbler in the same range till I know'd his track and his "yelp" as well as I do my old dogs. But the critter were so knowin' that when I "called" he would run from me, *taking the opposite direction to my footmarks.*

'The old scaly varmint kept pretty much about a ridge, at the end of which, where it lost itself in the swamp, was a hollow cypress tree. Now, I *were* determined to have that gobbler, boys; so what do I do but *put on my shoes heels foremost*, walk down the hill very quietly, and get into the hollow tree. Well then I gave a call; and, boys, it would have done your hearts good to see that turkey come trotting down the ridge towards me, looking at my tracks, and *thinking I had gone the other way.*'

It is not so difficult to kill the birds before they are full grown; and the European hunter would find it a good preparation for the more serious sport of killing adult gobblers, to practise on those which have attained rather more than half their growth. By commencing with these youngsters during the latter part of August, and continuing to shoot during the autumn months, something may be learnt of the peculiarities of the bird.

Soon after I first landed at Galveston, in Texas, I took

a passage in a boat which brought cord-wood for fuel from the mainland, for the purpose of having a look at the country; and after a voyage of about sixty miles over the bay we entered a sluggish stream called Cedar Bayon.

The bayou was about fifty yards wide, clear and deep. Huge trees grew up on either side, casting such a gloomy shadow on the water that it appeared black, although when dipped up in a pail it proved clear as crystal. The course of the river was very winding, and the breeze being kept off by the forest, it was necessary to pole the boat eight or ten miles up to the yard where the cord-wood was to be obtained; and as it was nearly evening when we entered the bayou, the captain determined to moor her to the bank for the night, and pole up in the morning.

But that, of course, was no business of mine. So while our worthy German skipper was preparing supper, I produced a fish-hook and line, by the aid of which I soon landed some fine fish, which served admirably to help out the fat pork and corn-bread which would otherwise have been our sole food. Soon after supper I was fast asleep. Long before it was daylight, my slumbers were disturbed by the monotonous tramping of the men on deck, as they poled the boat up against the current; and, finding it perfectly impossible to get any more sleep, I turned out of my blanket and plunged head foremost into the creek. After the refreshing

*header*, I dressed, and, lighting my pipe, quietly took a seat in the bow of the boat, watching the labours of the men to kill time till breakfast would be ready.

Several times I had heard distant noises to which I paid little heed, not being accustomed to the gobbling of the wild turkey; but at length one, who could not have been more than three hundred yards from the boat, gave a loud gobble, and then there could be no doubt in the mind of anyone who had ever heard the domestic bird of the farm-yard.

'Kome meestair,' said the German skipper, tapping me upon the shoulder, 'you go see if you can no get for our breakfast a fine turkey.'

As the boat was pushed across towards the shore for me to land, an American boy on board said—'You may catch sight of the bird, but I guess you won't kill it; they are about the shyest birds out.'

Being a young man, and having a tolerable gun, of course I held a different opinion, though I said nothing. On stepping ashore, I paused a few seconds, hoping to hear the sound repeated, so that I should know in which direction to seek my game; and very shortly the loud notes were again rolled forth. As near as I could judge the sounds seemed to be about three hundred yards off in the forest; so off I started very cautiously, sometimes crawling on hands and knees, taking advantage of every bunch of briar bushes or tree trunk that stood in my path, and walking as noiselessly as possible. The bird

seemed to be very quiet, and I feared that he had taken alarm; but by the time I had worked my way seventy or eighty yards into the forest the gobble was repeated.

Though there was an undergrowth of blackberry bushes, poison vines, and other small plants, the forest was tolerably open. The trees stood at some distance from each other, though their branches interlaced and mingled in such a manner as to check completely the growth of saplings and large bushes; in fact, it was so open that a deer standing up might have been seen at a distance of three or four hundred yards.

Of course the open nature of the ground was against me; so after a few minutes' thought I hid myself behind the trunk of a fallen tree, and there waited till the turkey should give me further information as to his whereabouts. In a few moments the bird again sounded his challenge, and directly afterwards I set eyes for the first time on a wild turkey.

It stood with its head in a listening attitude, one foot slightly raised, as though ready for instant flight; and I at once mentally acknowledged that it was the handsomest bird I had ever seen. In watching his actions, I observed that, although the wings were lowered till they swept the ground and the tail was extended like a huge fan while the fine fellow was in the act of gobbling, yet the moment the sound ceased the wings were folded, the tail was lowered, and every feather was in its place.

As I had only a double-shot gun, fourteen gauge, I

felt that my chance of becoming more intimately acquainted with him was very small, inasmuch as the bird stood with its head raised high up, and was at least two hundred yards from the spot where I stood. However, as he seemed disinclined to come towards me, I began to crawl onwards on hands and knees, hoping to be able to reach the spot without disturbing him. My hopes were doomed to be disappointed, for on reaching the spot where he had stood I could no longer see him. Full of disappointment, I shouldered my gun, returned to the banks of the creek, overtook the boat, and breakfasted with great disrelish on cold pork, while visions of devilled drumsticks floated before my eyes.

It was about noon when the boat reached the wood-yard, and being rather anxious to shine in the eyes of my fellow-voyagers, I again took my gun and strolled out into the woods. I had scarcely gone a hundred yards to the rear of the woodman's shanty, when a fine hen turkey ran from a corn-field into the forest, across a rough road, along which the cord-wood was hauled to the landing-place. To my unpractised eye it appeared so much like a tame bird rambling in the wood that I was afraid to shoot lest I might be called to account for the destruction of farm-yard poultry. But, as some misgivings crossed my mind, I returned to the wood-yard, and inquired if turkeys were kept there?

'Certainly not,' was the reply. 'The one you saw

was a wild bird;' and then followed a peal of laughter at the expense of the greenhorn who had allowed such a prize to escape.

My reputation would have suffered much from this in after years, but being comparatively a stranger in the land, no one expected great deeds from me. I returned to the spot where I had seen the bird, with the idea that it might again cross to the maize field, as it had not been shot at nor very greatly alarmed. I waited about in the road for an hour or two without seeing or hearing anything of it. Just as I was about to return home, I heard a slight noise, and the next instant the turkey again started to cross the road, only accomplishing half the journey however, for a charge of shot stopped its progress; and I secured my prize and started for the boat, much pleased at having made up for my former lack of success.

Besides man and his deadly fire-arms, the turkeys have other foes; so numerous are its enemies that it seems almost incredible that there should be such numbers still remaining in the forests. Besides the lynx, fox, 'possum, and the varieties of the cat tribe, the turkey has to defend herself and brood against the attacks of birds of prey. Crows and ravens will suck the eggs whenever they have a chance, while the snowy and the Virginian owls seize every opportunity to pounce upon the chicks, or even upon the old birds. Yet it is strange, that while on moonlight nights they

will allow the hunter to shoot them one by one, without exhibiting any alarm at the report of his rifle, the appearance of an owl will scare them all from their roosts.

Excepting in Texas, and one or two other States in the south, turkeys are now very shy, from having been so much hunted. The moment they observe a man, they instinctively move from him: they must therefore be approached with much caution. A friend of mine has described the movements and artifices of a celebrated turkey hunter when in pursuit of some veteran gobbler. The quick ear of the hunter having informed him whereabouts his game is, he quickly ensconces himself in ambush, placing a few green bushes before him to hide the muzzle of his rifle. Thus prepared, he takes his call, and gives one solitary '*cluck*,' so exquisitely that it chimes in with the running brook and the rustling leaf. It may be that half a mile off, if the place be favourable for conveying sound, a gobbler is feeding; prompted by his nature, as he scratches up the herbage that conceals his food, he gives utterance to the sounds that first attracted the hunter's attention.

Poor bird! he is bent upon filling his crop; his feelings are listless, commonplace; his wings are awry, the plumage on his breast seems soiled with rain, his wattles are contracted and pale. Look! he starts; every feather instantly assumes its place; he raises his

head from the ground and listens: what an eye! what a stride is suggested by that uplifted foot! Gradually the head sinks; again the bright plumage grows dim, and with a low cluck he resumes his search for food. The choicest treasures of the American forest are before him; the peccari nut is neglected for an immense grub-worm that rolls down a decayed stump, too large to crawl; now a grasshopper is caught; and presently a large ant-hill presents itself, over which the bird leans with wondrous curiosity, peering down the tiny holes out of which the industrious insects are issuing.

Again that *cluck* greets his ear; up rises the head with lightning swiftness, the bird starts forward a pace or two, looks round wonderingly, and then answers back.

No sound is heard but the falling acorn; and it fairly rattles as it dashes from limb to limb, and then falls to the ground. The bird is uneasy; he pecks pettishly, smooths down his feathers, elevates his head slowly, and then brings it to the earth; he raises his wings as if for flight, jumps upon the limb of a fallen tree, looks about, settles down finally into a brown study, and evidently begins to think.

An hour may have passed: he has turned the matter over; his imagination has become inflamed; he has heard just enough to wish to hear more. He is satisfied that no turkey hunter uttered the sounds that reached his ear, for they were too few and far between; and then there rises up in his mind the idea of some dis-

consolate mistress; and he gallantly flies down from his low perch, gives his body a swaggering motion, and utters a distinct and prolonged cluck, significant of both surprise and joy. At that instant the dead twigs near by crack beneath a heavy tread, and off starts the bird, under the impression that he is caught; but the meanderings of some ruminating old cow informs him of his mistake. Composing himself, he listens, until a low cluck in the distance reaches his ear.

Now, our gobbler is an old bird, not to be caught with chaff, and several times he has, as if by a miracle, escaped from harm with his life; he has grown very cunning indeed. He will not roost two successive nights upon the same tree, so that daylight never exposes him to the eye of the hunter, who has hidden away in the night with the intention of killing him in the morning's dawn. He never gobbles without running at least a short distance afterwards, as if he were ashamed of the noise he makes; he looks on everything as full of danger, and his experience during his life has heightened the instinct. Twice when young he was coaxed within gunshot, but thanks to some imperfection in the manufacture of the percussion caps, he managed to escape clear. After that, some idle schoolboy, who practised a species of ventriloquism, fooled him, and he would have been slain, had not the urchin, in his anxiety to kill him, overloaded his gun. Three times did he very nearly meet with death by heedlessly

wandering along with his thoughtless playfellows. Once he was caught in a pen, but escaped through an overlooked hole in the top; and three feathers of last year's fan decayed beneath the weight of a spring trap.

All this experience has rendered him a very deep bird, and he will sit on a stump pluming himself when common hunters are charming away, but never so wisely as to deceive him twice. They all reveal themselves and their crafty designs by overstepping the modesty of nature: they woo him too much; his loves are far more coy, far less intrusive.

Poor bird! He does not know that the hunter is spreading his snare for him, and is even then so sure of his victim, as to be revolving in his mind whether his goodly carcase shall be a present to a newly-married friend, or be served up in savoury fumes upon his own bachelor but hospitable board.

The last *cluck* heard by the gobbler fairly roused him, and he presses forward; at one time he runs with speed, then stops, as if not yet quite satisfied; something holds him back; still he lingers only for a moment in his course, until coming to a running stream where he will have to fly; the exertion seems too much for him.

Parading with stately strut in the full sunshine, he walks along the margin of the clear water, admiring his fine figure reflected in the sylvan mirror; and then, like some vain lover, tosses his head, as if to say, 'Let

them come to me.' The listless gait is resumed, denoting that for the present the chase is given up.

Gaining the ascent of a low bank that lines the stream which he has just deserted, he stops at the foot of a young beech; in the green moss that fills the interstices of the otherwise smooth bark is hidden away a cricket; the turkey pecks at it without catching it—something annoys him. Like the tiny slipper of Cinderella to the imagination of a young prince, or the glimpses of a waving ringlet or jewelled hand to the glowing passions of a warm, youthful heart, is the remembrance of that sound that now full two hours ago was first heard by our hero, and has in that long time been but twice repeated.

He speculates that in the shady woods surrounding him there must wander a mate; she plucks her food solitarily and calls for him. The monster man, impatient to kill his prey, doles not out his music so softly or so daintily; he fancies that he is not deceived, and that by giving way to his ungallant fears she will be won by another.

'Cluck!'

How well timed was that call! The brave gobbler, now entirely off his guard, contracts himself, opens wide his mouth, and rolls forth fearlessly a volume of sound for his answer.

The stream is crossed in a flutter; the toes scarcely indent themselves in the soft ground over which they

pass. On he plunges, until caution again brings him to a halt. We might almost hope that so fine a bird might escape, that there might be given one call too many—one that would grate harshly and unnaturally upon his fine ear. But not so; they lead him onwards to his doom, filling his heart alternately with fear and love.

Again he rolls forth a loud response and listens—yet no answer; his progress is still slow.

The cluck again greets his ear; there was a slight quaver attached to it this time, like the forming of a second note. He is nearing the object of his pursuit, and with a loud energetic call he rushes hastily forward, his long neck stretched out and his head moving in a suspicious, though inquiring manner, from side to side.

No longer going round the fallen trees, bushes, and various obstacles in his path, but flying over them in love's impetuous haste, he comes at length to an open space, and there stops.

Some six hundred yards from where the noble bird stands may be seen a fallen tree. You can observe some green brush that looks as if it grew out of the decayed wood. In the midst of this innocent-looking brush is hidden away the deadly fowling-piece of the turkey-hunter, and its muzzle is protruding towards the open ground.

Behind it is the hunter himself, lying flat on his

stomach on the ground, yet in such a position that the weapon is at his shoulder. He seems to be as dead and motionless as the tree in front of him; and could you watch him closely, you would perceive that he scarcely winks, for fear of alarming the wild and beautiful game.

The turkey still in his exposed situation gobbles; and on the instant the hunter raises his call to his lips, and gives a prolonged *cluck*, loud and shrill—the first that could be construed by the turkey into a direct or positive answer.

The noble bird, now feeling certain of success, fairly dances with delight; he starts forward, his feathers and neck amorously playing as he advances. Now he commences his 'strut:' his body swells; the beautiful plumage of his breast unfolds itself; his neck curves, drawing the head downwards; the wattles assume a scarlet hue, while the skin that covers the head changes like rainbow tints; the long feathers of the wing brush the ground; the tail rises and opens out into a splendid semicircle, while the gorgeously-coloured head becomes beautifully relieved in its centre.

On he comes with a hitching gait, glowing in the sunshine with purple and gold.

The siren cluck is twice repeated; he contracts his form to its very smallest dimensions; upwards rises the dainty head to its greatest height; he stands upon his very toes, and looks round suspiciously. Fifty yards of

distance protect him from the deadly weapon of the cautious hunter, and with assumed carelessness he even condescends to pick insects from the grass in the open space.

What a trial for the expectant hunter! How vividly does it recur to his mind that even a loud breath has often spoiled a morning's work. The minutes wear on, and then the bird again becomes the caller. He gobbles, opens his form, and, when he is fully bloomed out, the enchanting cluck greets his ear. On he comes, like the war-horse, towards the inspiring music of the drum, or like a bark beating against the wind, gallantly but slowly. The dark cold barrel of the gun is not now more silent than the hunter; the game is playing just outside the very edge of its deadly reach—the least mistake and it is gone. One gentle zephyr—one falling twig—might break the charm, and make nature revolt at the shyness apparent in the mistress; and then the gallant lover would wing his way to the woods.

But on he comes. So still is everything, that you can hear his wings distinctly as they brush along the ground; the sun plays in conflicting rays and coloured lights about his gaudily-bronzed plumage. The hunter's finger presses the trigger!—but the time has not yet come.

Suddenly the woods ring in echoing circles back upon the form of the hunter; a sharp report is heard! Out starts, in alarm at the unexpected noise, a blue jay,

which squalls as he passes in waving lines before you, so suddenly and unexpectedly was he awakened from his sound sleep. But our rare and beautiful bird—our gallant and noble bird—our cunning and game bird, what has become of him?

The glittering tints have faded from his bright plumage—the gay step has ceased—the bright eye has closed—all are gone. Without a movement of the muscles our valorous lover has fallen lifeless to the earth.

Such is the manner in which the cautious hunter captures a veteran gobbler, one who is used to all the tricks of the woodman's art—one whose wattles have already been cut with shot—one who, though suffering from starvation, would walk by the treasures of grain in the trap and pen—a gobbler who will listen to the plaintive voice of the female till he has tried its quavers, its length, and its repetitions, by every rule which nature has given him, and even then perhaps not answer, except in a smothered voice, for fear of being deceived;—such is the bird which the professed turkey-stalker of Texas will select to break a lance with, and, in spite of the chances against him, will, nine times out of ten, kill.

Here, then, we have the best specimen of the wild forest sports—a trial of skill between the perfection of animal instinct, and the superior mental endowments of man.

In the spring, after I landed at Galveston, I myself paid a visit to a celebrated turkey-hunter; and under his tuition I soon learned more of the habits of the bird, finding that it was more wary and more difficult to take than I had any idea of when I first tried my luck in the woods of Cedar Bayon.

'You will find,' said the hunter, while we were projecting a hunt, 'that the turkey is of all birds the most crafty game it will ever be your fortune to hunt. It is quite as suspicious as a thief, when he knows that the detective is on his track; the rustling of a dead leaf is sufficient to make it take wing, and so spoil your day's sport. It will start with fright at its own shadow, and run far away from the echoes of its own cry. Its ears are so sharp that I have frequently lost a whole morning's patient stalking when some nimble squirrel has leaped from one branch to another, and broken a dead twig in its haste. And then, too, it has the keenest sight in the world; an eagle is near-sighted compared with the turkey, whose vision can instantly detect any unwonted movement in the bushes, or the flight of a bird of prey as it soars far beyond reach of our eyes. You may approach a bear without the animal becoming aware of your presence, while a deer or hare will generally pause a moment to gaze before it darts away; but with the turkey it is different. To see an enemy is to fly instantly far beyond the reach of danger; and they have a keen instinct which teaches

them at once to distinguish enemies from friends or neutrals.'

The hunting gear with which my friend exercised his peculiar pastime was simple, though sufficient, consisting of his rifle and his '*caller*'—the musical instrument being constructed from the smaller of the two bones in the middle joint of a hen turkey's wing. So skilled was he in its use, that he was sometimes heard to boast that he 'could beat a turkey at talking his own language,' and I myself can bear witness that, during the time I sojourned with him, he never failed to kill turkeys whenever he went out into the forest with that intention.

The morning after my arrival at his house we were both on our way to the forest, where he had promised to show me how to call up a turkey. From the general tenor of his conversation it seemed that, although he had killed them early in the autumn, when they were not full grown, as well as in later months, when he hunted them with his trained turkey dogs, yet the sport most to his taste, and, in his opinion, the only legitimate style of turkey-killing, was to call up some crafty old gobbler and fool him.

'It does me good,' said he, 'to call up a cute old chap that's up to every dodge;—that's the sort I like to have to deal with; and I'll bet a Spanish mule to a rotten pumpkin, I drill a hole through him with a rifle bullet before I have done with him.'

I took my shot gun with me on this occasion, as my friend had promised to have a cock bird within range if I would attend to his instructions, and keep perfectly quiet. We were on our way to the hunting-grounds before the sun had fairly risen; on the grass and bushes hung a thick dew, which gave promise of a fine bright morning for the sport. The wind was blowing gently towards the north, and we pursued a westerly course, walking to our work right across the wind. When we had gone about a mile and a half, a gobble was plainly heard to our left, and we at once stopped to listen; in the course of five seconds a rival cock answered the challenge.

Having thus satisfied himself that the turkeys were in the neighbourhood, my friend D——, the turkey-hunter, looked about for a place of concealment, and soon found a fallen tree, behind which we sat down, having our guns cocked and in readiness. The tree concealed us perfectly.

Having thus arranged our ambuscade, D—— took his turkey-caller from his bullet-pouch, gave two clear distinct calls, and then listened most eagerly.

The bird we first heard was the first to answer, the wind blowing the sound almost directly towards him; and about two seconds afterwards the one in advance of us answered with three or four gobbles in rapid succession.

'I fear we shall be obliged to let one of them go,'

whispered D——; 'the report of your gun will send the other chap flying in half a second. However, don't fancy we are to have no sport, for the morning is young yet, and we can try our luck elsewhere. But, mark, I shall not answer them for ten minutes; the delay will make them both more anxious.'

So excited was I, that the ten minutes seemed at least an hour, but at length D—— gave another call; giving only two clucks this time. In an instant the answer from the left-hand bird rolled back on the morning breeze, and a moment afterwards we heard the gobble of the second. It was evident that he, too, had heard the *clucks*, and had answered them rather than his rival; no doubt feeling much more inclined to make love than to declare war.

'That sounds more healthy,' exclaimed D——; 'after all we stand a chance of killing the pair.'

From the voices of the two birds, their gobbling sounding much nearer than when first heard, it was evident that they were approaching us at a rapid rate, and I felt rather surprised that D—— did not repeat the sounds which lured them so far.

'I shall leave them alone for a few minutes,' said he, reading my thoughts; 'it is quite probable that they have already had a battle for the good graces of some plump hen, and so they will make a race of it to see who can get to her first.'

At least a quarter of an hour passed by, during which

the turkey-hunter remained as motionless and quiet as the old tree-stump which concealed him. The two cocks, however, were not so cautious; and at frequent intervals they rolled out loud sonorous gobbles, both as challenges to each other, and to elicit a response from the unseen seeming hen. D—— was almost as excited as myself, though being more accustomed to this kind of still-hunting, his agitation was not so apparent. He made not the least noise; conveying his ideas to me as he was able by means of signs.

'They'll meet together presently,' he signalled with his lips, 'and then I can call them both up.'

To the rivals the hen bird must have seemed excessively shy and coy, for no enticing cluck encouraged their advances, while they filled the air with invitations and declarations of love and war. As minute after minute passed away, the birds seemed to become more and more excited.

'It is all right now,' D—— at length whispered, putting his mouth close to my ear. 'They'll come close to us as soon as I give another cluck; so get your gun ready to follow my shot. I'll take the right-hand bird and shoot first, because you can work your short gun quicker than I can the rifle.'

So saying, D—— glanced at his weapon, to see that all was right, and then again sent forth two clear, distinct calls from the little bone between his lips. This done, he at once dropped the instrument which

had done such wonders into his bullet-pouch, and grasping his rifle, prepared to fire—kneeling on one knee, and resting his elbow on the other.

As he had told me, it was indeed a race between the noble birds. All their native caution seemed thrown aside, and they came running with eager haste till they were not more than thirty paces from the log that sheltered us. Then, not seeing the expected hen, they paused, as though to discover her whereabouts. They brushed their wings along the ground, and extended their fans; the skins of their necks and heads assumed as many tints as a rainbow or soap-bubble, as they experienced alternately the passions of love and anger. In loud notes they defied each other, and sought to obtain a response of admiration from the hen, who, they felt certain, was hidden in the wood close by, doubtless looking with admiring eyes on their splendid plumage and gallant behaviour.

Suddenly was heard the sharp crack of a rifle, and the woods around rang in a thousand echoing circles, while a light cloud of white smoke floated gently upwards, seeming at length to become entangled in the branches of the trees overhead.

One splendid bird lay upon the mossy ground, his head cleft by the unerring bullet; while the rival, after standing one half second in seeming bewilderment, made a movement as though to take flight. But even that slight hesitation was sufficient to enable me to

cover him with my gun, and then half a dozen buck-shot stretched him dead, although not so cleanly killed as had been his brother in misfortune. D—— rose to his feet and reloaded his rifle, while I renewed the charge in the right barrel of my gun.

'We have them both,' he said, 'just as I expected. But I hope you paid particular attention to my calling.'

'Yes. I thought it was the best imitation of a hen turkey I had ever heard. Had I not seen the call in your mouth, I should have fallen into the same mistake that cost these beauties their lives.'

'That is not what I mean. Did you notice how very little I called, and what long intervals I allowed between each cluck?'

'Certainly,' I replied.

The old hunter filled his pipe, and was enveloped in a cloud of smoke, before he went on.

'Then just remember that, if you wish to have much sport in wild turkey calling, you may pipe as little as you please, so long as the cock answers your summons. I find that many fools from the old settlements, who fancy themselves hunters, will pipe away, as if for the pleasure of hearing their own noise; but you should remember that a gobbler has a good ear for music, and will in an instant detect a false or unnatural note; and this, too, any gobbler who had reached years of discretion would be much more likely

to run *from* than *to* such an infernal hubbub. Depend upon it, more turkeys are lost in that way than by calling too little. But come along to breakfast.'

After this I frequently amused myself in the woods on fine spring mornings, by calling up gobblers, and always found my friend correct in his opinions and instructions.

But there is another kind of sport better suited to the winter months before the gobblers would answer a call: and that is, hunting them with a properly trained turkey dog. A well-trained dog will never range very far from his master till he finds the warm scent of a single turkey or a flock. Then he will start upon the trail without giving tongue until he finds the game. He will then run on, and by continual yelping, compel it to ascend some tree. If it is a single bird, he will then sit beneath the branch where the turkey has taken refuge, and continue to bark till his master arrives, and with a well-directed shot brings the bird to the ground.

In this kind of hunting, the more the dog barks when he has 'treed' the game, the greater is the hunter's chance of success, because by so doing it distracts the bird's attention, and the hunter is often able to approach unobserved. For two reasons, the hunter should approach and shoot behind the bird: in the first place, the turkey, in all probability, will not see him, being too much engaged in watching the

motions of the dog; and, in the second place, the closely-set feathers will turn aside even small-sized buck-shot if aimed at the breast; it is, therefore, much the wiser plan to shoot up the feathers than against them. I soon found that the latter method did not pay, having in my early days of gobbler-hunting lost many a fine bird by vainly expending a charge of shot against the bird's armour-plated breast.

In approaching the treed bird, so as to get a shot, the hunter must exercise much patience and caution, as the bird invariably takes wing and is lost if it discovers the least sign of a human being. Its instinct tells it that in the tree it has nothing to fear from the dog. A single bird is much more easily killed than one in a flock, because in the latter case so many keen bright eyes are prying about, that some individual of the gang is almost sure to see the hunter, and then the slightest movement causes them to take flight, while a single bird is occupied in watching the dog.

During my stay with my friend D ——, whose prowess and cunning have been already described, and who taught me to call up cocks, we used to cross the river from Washington County, where his settlement was, and hunt in the Brazos County twice or thrice a week. As an average, the proceeds of our day's sport would be a couple of deer, and perhaps eight turkeys, of which I must confess D—— killed the lion's share.

The best season for this kind of sport was, in our

opinion, from the middle of October till the end of January, when the male birds begin to seek out their mates, and the season for calling commences. After the 1st of February, we very rarely shot at a hen-turkey till the following autumn, when she had reared her brood.

At the time I speak of, Brazos County, although a large tract of land, had no more inhabitants than a little country village, and was almost entirely covered with forest. This was a dozen years ago; and although, no doubt, some clearings have been made, there is still enough of the ancient woods left to harbour swarms of game. When I was there my friend D—— called the place his poultry-yard—so large was the quantity of turkeys which he killed there.

Sometimes turkey-roosts are discovered by the hunter, who will mark the spot well, and then return at night when the moon is full. At such times the birds seem stupified, and a tolerable marksman will have a good chance of killing half the flock; although if a wild cat appeared on the tree, or an owl sailed over head, all their instinct of self-preservation would return.

I have casually spoken of trapping turkeys; but as no thorough sportsman can feel anything but disgust at such a method of killing game, I shall not enlarge on the subject. With his good gun, a well-trained dog, and the instructions of a veteran woodsman, more and nobler sport can be obtained, and the young hunter

can eat the game that falls to his gun, without feeling that he has killed a bird in a manner which is considered unfair both here and in America.

Turkeys can be killed wholesale by destroying the hen when her chicks are half-grown, and then calling up the brood; but this is rarely done by the backwoods' hunters although they are not restricted as to the quantity they may kill, nor the time at which it is lawful to kill. But this I know, that the man who would kill a doe in fawn, except accidentally, or would destroy turkeys in the last-mentioned manner, would be looked upon with as much dislike by American hunters as he would by English game-preservers.

By my last received accounts, game is more plentiful than ever on the Texan prairies; and, doubtless, many English sportsmen will be tempted across the Atlantic. For myself, I can only say—'Would I were there!'

# CHAPTER XIV.

## GROUSE, SNIPE, QUAIL, WOODCOCK.

THE PINNATED GROUSE; TETRAS CUPIDO, LA GELINOTTE HUPPÉE D'AMERIQUE—THE PRAIRIE-HEN, GROUSE, OR HEATH-HEN—THE AMERICAN QUAIL; ORTYX VIRGINIANA, LA PERDRIX D'AMÉRIQUE—THE QUAIL, IMPROPERLY NAMED THE PARTRIDGE THROUGH ALL THE SOUTHERN STATES—THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK; SCOLOPAX MINOR, LA BECASSE D'AMÉRIQUE—THE AMERICAN SNIPE; SCOLOPAX WILSONII—AMERICAN BITTERN; ARDEA MINOR, INDIAN HEN, THE QUAWK—THE GOLDEN PLOVER; CHARADRIUS VIRGINICUS—THE RINGED PLOVER, OR KILLDEER; CHARADRIUS VOCIFERUS—THE LONG-LEGGED PLOVER; RECURVIROSTRA HIMANTOPUS.

AS the Pinnated Grouse, or Prairie-hen, has been of late years introduced to the London markets (thanks to steam, and the irrepressible instinct of the Yankee to earn a dollar), its form, size, colour, and general appearance, are pretty well known.

Few are found (I believe none) in the Southern States east of the Mississippi River, the country being too wooded for these prairie-loving birds.

In the North, the prairies of Illinois are famed for the numbers of these birds; but it is only because Texas has been, until lately, so little known that she

has not had an equal, or greater, fame for these game-birds, which are found upon most of her grassy seas by thousands.

In Texas, the season for pairing is March, and the breeding season continues through April and May. During this season the male can be heard in the early mornings a mile away, or more, sounding like the subdued bellowing of a bull. The hen makes her nest on the ground, laying seldom fewer than ten eggs, and sometimes more than twenty; and, were it not for the vermin—the skunks, weasels, stoats, &c., and the eagles and prairie hawks, they would soon become almost too numerous, the dry summers of Texas being very favourable for their breeding. The eggs are rather smaller, but of the same colour and shape as those of a guinea-hen. Prairie roads much travelled are frequented by the hen when rearing her brood, for the sake of the undigested oats and maize dropped by the passing horses. In June and July I have frequently surprised them at this employment.

Plantations made on the prairies are much visited by the grouse for the sake of the maize, peas, and other grain to be found there. On the prairies they find partridge-berries, wild vetches, wild myrtle-berries, grass-seeds, &c., and in the autumn they resort to the edges of the forests, or to wooded prairie sloughs, for the sake of the mast-bearing trees, becoming at this season so fat from the acorns, haws, &c., that they will

then allow themselves to be shot down, one after the other, to the extent of four or five shots, before they become alarmed enough to take wing. At this time, too, and through the winter, they frequently *pack* to the number of five or six hundred.

On the prairie, at the back of West Columbia, on the Brazos River, and on Matagorda Prairie to the east of the Colorado River, I have seen fully that number flushed from the haw-bushes, when, after a few shots, the 'pack' has become thoroughly alarmed.

They are not in the least migratory; for though they may take long flights, being particularly strong on the wing, they always return to their favourite prairie-mounds for the breeding season.

From their readiness to perch when flushed, or in search of food, many have supposed that they roost in trees; but this is not the case, as I have frequently disturbed a covey at night when I have been compelled to ride across the prairies with only the stars, and my knowledge of 'the lay of the land,' to guide my course.

One of the most singular characteristics of the male bird are the two extraordinary pieces of loose skin on either side of the neck, just below the tufts of neck-feathers, which have given them the name of *pinnated*. Through the summer and winter the skin is of a natural colour, but in the spring it becomes yellow, and when these loose pieces of skin, or bags, are inflated,

the bird seems to have a couple of oranges attached to its neck. Walking upon its toes, the wings lowered, and scraping the ground, the tail spread like a fan—in short, imitating the *strut* of the turkey-cock,—and with these two yellow globes, the bird has a most extraordinary appearance.

The adult bird will weigh three pounds, and some of the old cocks will often weigh from half to three-quarters of a pound more.

The sportsman can scarcely go wrong over our Texas plains to get good grouse-shooting. When disturbed, the covey generally takes a very long flight, rarely stopping short of a mile when flushed; and should there be a stiff breeze blowing, and if they start with it under their tails, you will be fortunate if they stop before having flown a couple of miles at the very least. But as the atmosphere is always clear, anyone accustomed to prairie life will find little difficulty in marking them down, though a tiro would, to a certainty, be deceived by the prairie, and fancy himself on the very spot, though possibly he may be half-a-mile short of it.

When grouse shooting in Texas, I generally managed thus: When my dogs came to a point, I used to dismount (all kinds of sports are pursued on horseback in Texas, both from the heat of the weather and the extent of the country, as well as for the convenience of packing home the game, shoe-leather being dearer than horse-flesh), and throwing the lasso, attached to my horse's head-stall,

over my left shoulder, I walked, followed by my horse, in a half-circle, ahead of my pointers, and having flushed the covey, I made my shot, or shots. Then before loading, or whilst loading, I followed the covey with my eyes till they alighted; and taking a bunch of wild myrtle bushes, a taller weed than usual, a bunch of flowers, blue, red, or yellow, a wild coffee-bean bush, or, if none of these could be seen, a speck of white cloud in the dark blue sky, or lastly, the bearing of my own shadow, I, when my gun was ready, followed them up, my dogs having first retrieved my dead birds. As I had sometimes a mile or two to go, my horse saved me much fatigue.

I may state, relative to the abundance of the prairie grouse in Texas, that I never went out with the express desire of shooting them without making a good bag.

The American Quail (*Ortyx Virginiana*), bears equally well the two extremes of climate, the cold of an Upper Canadian winter, and the fierce summer sun of Texas. Almost everywhere in the United States it is called *the partridge*, and in the Southern States, *where it is not migratory*, it more nearly resembles in its habits the English partridge than the European quail.

Even as to the quail (*O. V.*) being migratory in the Northern States, opinions are divided, as the conclusion of the following quotation from the pen of the late 'Frank Forester' (Henry William Herbert),

the greatest authority on field sports ever known in the United States, will prove :—

'The ornithological name of the partridge is *perdix*, of the quail *coturnix*, of the American bird, distinct from either, *ortyx*; the latter being the Greek word, as the *coturnix* is the Latin word, meaning quail.

'It is of course impossible to talk of killing ortyxes, or more properly, ortyges; we must therefore, perforce, call these birds either quail or partridge.

'Now, as both the European partridges are considerably larger than the American bird, as they are never migratory in any country, and as they differ from the *ortyx* in not having the same woodland habits, in cry, and in plumage; while in size, (?) and in being a bird of passage, the European resembles that of America—resembling it in all other respects far more closely than the partridge proper—I cannot hesitate for a moment in saying that American quail is the correct and proper English name for the *Ortyx Virginiana*; and, I conceive, that the naturalists who first distinguished him from the quail, with which he was originally classed, sanction the English nomenclature by giving him a scientific title directly analogous to quail, and not to partridge.

'I should as soon think, myself, of calling the bird a turkey as a partridge, and I shall ever uphold that the question is entirely set at rest, and that the true name of this dear little bird in the vernacular is, *American*

*quail*; and his country has better reason to be proud of him than she has of many of her sons, who make much more noise in the world than our favourite 'Bob White.'

'(The cry of the quail resembling these two words, has caused him to be thus christened by the country folk.)

'While on this subject, I may observe, for the benefit of our northern sportsmen—many of whom I have heard state that the quail is not migratory—that everywhere west of the Delaware, he is as distinctly a bird of passage as the woodcock, and the farther west the more palpably so.

'Why he loves these habits with us of the Middle States I cannot guess, nor has any naturalist so much as alluded to the fact, which is nevertheless indisputable.'

Whether stress of weather may render the quail migratory in the Northern States or not I can neither affirm or deny; but that they are non-migratory in the South I am quite sure, for when living on Matagorda Prairie I had some scores of tame quail, which were always around my place, and would allow me to walk close by them, and come to be fed like barn-door fowls. I fancied I knew several of them on the same principle as that by which a shepherd is able to distinguish the faces in his flock.

The eggs are white, and vary in number from ten to twenty: sometimes even twenty-five have been found

in a nest. I have often counted twenty-six in a bevy—two old ones and twenty-four young birds.

The flight of the American quail is short. They seldom fly more than four hundred yards when flushed, and are easily marked down. They have one very singular attribute. After being first flushed, and then only, they are able to retain their scent, and your pointers, or setters, may range over and all around them, without discovering the birds. If they are trampled up, or by any means put once again to flight, this singular quality no longer remains to them. This speciality is enjoyed by no other game bird with which I am acquainted.

At first I was much puzzled by this curious fact. I was, perhaps, the first man who introduced or used pointers in Texas, and shot small game in English fashion; and although this singularity was well known, and had been frequently discussed by northern sportsmen in magazines and newspapers in the Atlantic States, I had not then read about it, or even heard of it, and it was not until long after I had satisfied myself that the quail possessed this remarkable peculiarity that I saw it stated in Porter's 'Spirit of the Times,' in the department of the paper headed, 'Fur, Fin, and Feather,' then edited by the late Henry William Herbert ('Frank Forester').

For the benefit of any of my fellow-sportsmen who may follow in my steps, I shall relate my first day's

experience at quail in Texas, a day not readily forgotten, though it is nearly twenty years since.

I was staying at Galveston Island, and had picked up an odd quail or two, and a good many snipe, coots, ducks, geese, &c, when one day the landlord of my hotel informed me, that a countryman of mine from the mainland had arrived with a boatful of sweet potatoes, corn, and other farm produce, and he stated that if I wished to visit the mainland, now was my opportunity.

I soon met my countryman, and arranged with him to carry me across the bay and give me a fortnight's shelter at his house.

Terms were soon arranged; and that afternoon late, I took my seat in the stern of his little sloop, accompanied by my pointer, my double-gun—in a waterproof case, thoroughly cleaned for the morrow's work—resting across my knees. We had a head wind; and though the distance to Bolivar Point was only four miles, it took us till nearly dark to beat that trifling distance. After making our little port we had a walk of a mile and a-half across the prairie to the house.

A tribe of boys and hobbledehoys met us at the landing—the sons of mine host—to carry up the necessaries purchased in the city of Galveston, as well as the sail and other loose 'fixings' of the little sloop. Old Solomon P——, my host, led the way, and shouldering my gun, with my pointer at my heels, I followed him, while the others came behind as fast as they loaded

themselves with the *impedimenta*. Arrived at the house I was introduced to mine hostess—an Englishwoman—to my supper, to the boykins as they made their appearance, and finally, to my bed.

Before going to bed I had set my gun in its waterproof case in a corner of the supper-room, amongst some dozen others of all sorts, rifles, duck-guns, and double-barrels. On coming into the room the next morning rather early, my eyes naturally turned to the corner where I had placed my gun over night.

It was gone.

Running out to the verandah, I met one of my host's sons, and very anxiously asked him if he knew what had become of my gun.

'I guess, brother Sol. has taken it out birding,' was the free and easy answer.

I was dreadfully annoyed. Had I been asked to lend my wife, my gun, or my thoroughly-broken pointer—supposing I had possessed the first-mentioned article,—I should have been equally unwilling to lend the one as the other; but for a bit of a boy, a little dirty, careless, ne'er-do-well, to march off with my clean gun, just as I wished to use it, was rather 'piling up the agony.'

If the worthy Sol. junior has escaped through the civil war, and 'memory holds her seat,' he most probably remembers the comprehensive blessings bestowed upon him when he returned shortly after. Luckily,

he was a growing lad, and therefore hungry, and in time his breakfast had greater charms for him than my clean gun.

Having cleaned my gun again, and finding that it had happily escaped all danger at the hands of Solomon junior, I made a better breakfast than a short time before I had hoped to do. The meal ended, I started with my pointer, accompanied by three or four of the boys, who thrust their services upon me.

One would have been necessary to show me where it was likely for me to find game, as I was a stranger to the country, but the others I could readily have dispensed with. Rushing about the prairie as wildly as mustangs, one flushed a prairie hen, the first living one I had ever seen, and though it was a very long way off, I fired, being very desirous of killing it. The legs dropped, but it continued its flight as I followed it with my eyes.

'Can you hit 'em a-flying, stranger?' said one lad.

'Don't seem like it!' said another, who had not noticed that the bird was hard hit.

Presently the bird shot straight up into the air 'towering,' then fell headlong to the prairie grass. My dog presently pointed the dead bird, and I took advantage of my chance shot to drill my too forward followers into a little better discipline; and, as I had won their respect in some slight degree, I succeeded.

In the long grass outside some mezquite-bushes,

which covered about a quarter of an acre, my pointer found and pointed a bevy of quail. There were about twenty in it; and, as they got up under my feet, I took my time, picked out my birds, and killed a couple right and left. This exploit quite won the respect of my wild companions, and now they really stood still till I had loaded, and allowed my bitch to find her dead birds. They had pitched in the edge of the bushes, and I followed them with my dog. Much to my surprise, though marked to an inch, she failed to find a bird. Every inch was hunted, but no point was made. Beckoning up my followers, we began to beat the bushes and grass tussocks, the very spots my pointer had so closely hunted.

Whir! went a quail, as a tussock was kicked; and whir! whir! as the whole bevy were put to the rout. Again I killed a brace and marked the rest.

This time I had no more difficulty; my dog pointed them successfully as she found them, and I killed nearly, or quite all the company.

For the remainder of my visit my gun and dog were sacred, and I enjoyed capital sport, marred only by one circumstance, and that was the manner in which the little heathens took my dead birds when brought home, and, half cooking them, devoured them with no more respect than if they were raw beef-steaks.

The American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). Though there may be some controversy as to the migratory

habits of the quail, there is none about the woodcock. Early in October, the pioneers of these birds begin to be occasionally seen in the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, and by the end of that month they are plentiful.

The bird is shorter and clumsier, and has a duller plumage than the European woodcocks.

Their favourite feeding grounds at night (for they are nocturnal in their habits) are the cotton fields, and in these they are often killed by the negroes in large quantities. The negroes, carrying a torch held high above their heads, are enabled to see them running down the cotton rows, and, having a long bamboo cane in their hand, tap them on the head, and kill them. I have heard of as many as seventy being procured on one plantation in Louisiana in a single night. They eat quite as well as the English bird, and in young switch bamboo, sometimes give good sport when you have a good dog to hustle them up. Their flight is short, and is a curve up, and, after describing a half-circle, down again. Owing to its retiring habits in the daytime (for generally it buries itself in the most tangled cane-brakes and thickest jungles), few, comparatively, are killed throughout the Southern States, and many people who are simply deer-hunters may live a lifetime in the haunts of these birds, and be all the while ignorant of their presence.

The American Snipe (*Scolopax Wilsonii*). The

swamps and prairie-sloughs swarm with these birds in the winter. English sportsmen, who have shot them in the Northern States, have stated that they are not so large as the European snipe, although they closely resemble each other. This I imagine to be a mistake, or else the birds are fatter in the South; for there I have frequently found them weigh five and sometimes six ounces, which is fully equal to the weight of snipe in Europe.

The English snipe has fourteen feathers in the tail; the American sixteen.

The American Bittern (*Ardea minor.*)—Indian Hen. —The Quawk. These birds are seldom shot in the South, though they are frequently flushed from the flags surrounding the prairie-ponds and sloughs; the people having an absurd prejudice against eating them. I have had an opportunity of killing more than a dozen in the course of a day's duck-shooting; but, knowing that I should simply be killing them to no purpose, I have contented myself by killing a couple for my own use, and allowed the others to go free.

Their flesh is particularly white and delicate, and when properly cooked there are few nicer birds. In fact, in the South, the people care but little for small game, and designate snipe, woodcocks, quail, and grouse, as 'no account trash.' This only, of course, applies to the rough backwoodsmen, whom the devil provides with cooks, though surrounded with the

greatest delicacies, of which, from lack of the skill or knowledge, they are unable to make use. In the towns foreign merchants, English, French, &c., buy up these game birds whenever they are brought to market by any chance, and are only too glad to do so.

Of an evening the booming of these bitterns can be heard at a great distance as they roam about the swamps.

Three kinds of plover visit the Texas plains in the spring, and again in the autumn. They stay about four or five weeks on each occasion; and, though poor in flesh when they arrive, they soon begin to get fat, and before they leave become the fattest birds I have ever seen—the oil pouring from the wounds, caused by the small shot kernels, like water.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE WILD FOWL.

AMERICAN SWAN; CYGNUS AMERICANUS—CANADA GOOSE; ANSER CANADENSIS—THE WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE; ANSER ALBIFRONS—THE WHOOPING CRANE; GRUS AMERICANA—THE MALLARD; ANAS BOSCHAS—LE CANARD SAUVAGE—THE AMERICAN WIDGEON; ANAS AMERICANA—THE BLUE-WINGED TEAL; ANAS DISCORS—THE GREEN-WINGED TEAL; ANAS CRECCA, OR CAROLINENSIS—THE WOOD, OR SUMMER DUCK; ANAS SPONSA—PINTAIL DUCK; ANAS ACUTA—THE SHOVELLER; ANAS CLYPEATA—THE BLACK OR DUSKY DUCK; ANAS OBSCURA.

As soon as the winter commences in the North, the wild fowl begin their southward migration. The first to arrive are the blue-winged teal; next come the snipe and woodcock; then the green-winged teal and the varieties of the duck tribe; after these the geese, followed lastly, by the magnificent wild swans.

The bays on the Gulf of Mexico often swarm with them, and I remember being once on a steamboat which plied between Galveston and Houston, and which ran aground in the night at the head of Galveston Bay. In the morning, upon going on deck, we were all astonished to see vast numbers of swans around us, and, as far as as we could roughly guess their numbers, we

estimated that at least two thousand were in sight from the deck.

They feed principally upon the water-weed, Valisneria Americana, worms, insects, &c., but I believe never touch fish. They are exceedingly watchful; and he is a careful stalker who can get within shot; but many are killed by gunners hidden on some point of land between two bays or other pieces of water.

When shooting ducks near Anahuac, at the head of Galveston Bay, I killed a very heavy swan, and to escape the fatigue of carrying it, I gave the bird to an old German woman, who had as much idea of the art of cooking as a pig.

Passing that way a few days afterwards, I was curious to know what the woman had done with the swan, which I knew to be a young bird, and exceedingly fat, and which I should have only been too glad of myself, if I could have carried it. In answer to my inquiries, I was told that she had 'parboiled it' (an ingenious way of soddening meat, much affected in the States, after which the meat is baked till it is so dry as to eat like sawdust), that she had obtained three pints of grease by skimming the water, and that when baked it had lasted her so long that she became tired of it.

I imagine, that if English wild-fowl-shooters would visit Texas for a winter, provided with punts, guns, &c., they would meet with such sport as Europe cannot furnish.

The Canada Goose is the common wild goose of America, and it visits the southern waters and prairies by hundreds of thousands. At night they generally seek the bays or lakes, but by day they graze upon the short grass of the prairies, preferring those spots where the grass has been burnt off, and where the new grass is greenest.

They are easily killed from the saddle, and a sportsman has little difficulty in riding to a flock when grazing on the prairie, if he will only ride in a circle around them, gradually diminishing the distance as he inclines his horse towards them, the geese on their part huddling up together. At the proper moment the horse is halted, and a little hail-storm of five-and-twenty small buckshot are rained upon the compact mass of twenty or thirty geese, and the other barrel, with a like charge, is worked at them when their wings are extended to rise. This often proves more destructive than the first fire.

When living at West Columbia, near the Brazos River, I killed, in less than four weeks, one hundred and thirty-five geese, besides other game—deer, grouse, quail, ducks, snipe, &c.

The White-Fronted Goose, and several other varieties of the anseres, arrive about the same time, or a little later. The two varieties mentioned, however, are the most valuable as birds for the table.

Two very large Cranes, the Whooping and the Sand-

hill, stay all the winter in the Southern States. The latter can be easily killed by a man on horseback, who approaches them in the same manner as in getting to geese, but the whooping-cranes, from their superior height and greater timidity, are rarely killed. I did not kill more than fifteen during the fifteen years I hunted in Texas—thus averaging about one a year—though scarcely a winter passed during which I did not kill at least a hundred of the grey variety.

The Mallard (Anas Boschas), or Common Wild Duck, breeds in almost all the States of North America, but sparingly—the greater portion going farther north, for the purposes of incubation. During the winter, in the Southern States, the boys who are just old and strong enough to carry a gun kill thousands of them, and, in some form or other—roasted, baked, or broiled—these birds appear on almost every table as regularly as the venison steaks and the inevitable pork and hominy.

In Louisiana, the amphibious inhabitants at the mouths of the Mississippi—who, fishermen and oystermen in the summer, are wild-fowlers in the winter—kill large numbers, which meet with a ready sale in New Orleans. In Texas all the large towns, such as Galveston, Houston, Indianola, Corpus Christi—where regular markets are established—are bountifully supplied with them. They are readily disposed of to the merchants, the landlords of hotels, &c.; and men fond of the gun,

who are in England 'cabin'd, cribbed, confined,' by lack of ground to shoot over, could there make a decent living by supplying the markets, whilst giving rein to their sporting aspirations.

When the *mast* is falling in the forests, these ducks are to be found in all the woodland lakes and ponds, where they wander ashore to collect the fallen acorns, or dive for those which have fallen into the water from overhanging trees. When the nuts, acorns, &c., have been pretty well exhausted, they resort to the prairie ponds and sloughs, and in mid-winter scarcely a puddle is to be found which does not hold ducks. I never kept an account of the wild fowl I killed during my residence in Texas. Had I done so, I should have been afraid to mention the quantity which fell to my gun; but the number must have been enormous, as on almost every day throughout the year I handled the rifle or the shot-gun.

The American Widgeon breeds only in the extreme North, in the boundless mosses and morasses of Labrador and Boothia Felix, and it is rather later in making its appearance in the South than the other ducks.

I have had capital sport with them on Old Caney Creek, in Matagorda County, and on Oyster Creek, in Brazoria County. They are to be found, like the rest of the ducks, scattered generally over the whole of the Southern States.

The Blue-Winged Teal, the first of our winter visitants,

is said to stay sometimes and breed as far south as Texas.

On one occasion, while with two friends (I was shooting prairie hens in September, on the prairie near West Columbia), we observed a flock of seventeen blue-winged teal wheeling round a prairie pond. We dropped into the tall grass and watched them. Suddenly, they fell like so many lumps of lead (as is the fashion of these birds) into the water. We crawled up cautiously. At a sign from one to the other that all was ready, we emptied our right-hand barrels. Fifteen of the teal were killed or wounded, and the surviving pair were stopped by two shots from the left-hand barrels of our guns.

They feed chiefly on vegetable food, and are particularly fond of grass-seeds, and the grains of the wild-oats and reeds. They are often trapped by the negroes in the common contrivance called a 'figure of four.'

The Green-Winged Teal is almost like the European. It differs from it simply by wanting the white line which the European teal has above each eye; and for years I shot this bird, considering it identical with those I had killed in the fens at Botsham, in Cambridgeshire, where I wasted more time than I did in the lecture-room of Queen's College, Cambridge.

The Wood, or Summer Duck (*Anas Sponsa*), is one of the prettiest of all the ducks. Constantly to be found in the forest ponds, or in the bayous and streams fringed by timber, it is rarely seen in the unsheltered ponds on

the prairies. The first one I ever saw or shot was on Cedar Bayou, a sluggish stream emptying into Galveston Bay, and, fancying I had found quite a new bird, I was delighted with it. A settler, to whom I showed it, soon assured me that it was a very common bird indeed.

The Pintail is a very common bird in Texas and the South during the winter.

The Shoveller is abundant in the extreme South, though rare in the Northern States.

The Black, or Dusky Duck, breeds in the South, and is there throughout the year.

I may as well give some general remarks upon the shooting on the coast from my own experience. The inland brackish bays are covered with wild swans and geese, and numberless varieties of ducks, which flock to them at dusk, whilst further in the interior of the country, the flocks of ducks, and mallards, and blue and green-winged teal, seek the fresh-water lakes.

All night long the quacking of the ducks, the murmuring of the teal, and the whistling of the widgeon, can be heard, as the flight-shooter sits concealed in the tall sedge, or reeds. Now and then, though not often—for I could always kill as many as I needed in broad daylight—I have been induced to join two or three friends in a night's flight-shooting, though it is a very wasteful method, as scarcely one in three of the killed or badly wounded birds are ever bagged.

I was living on the borders of the Great Bay Prairie the

whole of one winter, and at two lakes upon it, near the edge of the forest, I was persuaded to spend the night. The upper lake was about one mile long by two hundred yards wide, gradually narrowing as it approached the lower lake, which was three miles in length and very narrow, being hardly one hundred yards across at its broadest. The two lakes were divided from each other by a strip of land about thirty yards wide; and this was the best place for shots, as, when disturbed, the wild fowl crossed it in flying from one lake to the other; and here were generally placed two guns.

Some nights, when we mustered strong, we used to post three guns at the upper lake—one on each side, and one at the top—whilst the lower lake, from its extreme length, needed at least seven guns to work it properly—three on each side and one at the end. Enough white men could generally be found; but when this was not the case, we made up the deficiency with the 'darkies;' those who could shoot being found in shot, whilst those who could not had only powder, *vox et prætera nihil*,—all that we expected from them being to keep the fowl on the wing.

A night in the South, with the moon at or near the full, is almost as light as an English November day, and you can see well enough to shoot at anything flying above you, or on either side, so long as it is clear of the horizon or woods, and you can catch it as it cuts against the sky. Even on darker nights it requires no

very long practice to learn to shoot at the whistling wings as the masses of fowl fly by you.

There is, however, one drawback which a European sportsman, newly arrived in the country, would disapprove of—the mosquitoes. These little pests take kindly to the thick, saccharine, beery blood of your well-fed Britisher; and when they bite, they puff up the parts and irritate him till he learns to swear at the 'cusses.' The natives, or those acclimatized, however, suffer but little: their blood has become so thin that no swelling or irritation follows the bite; and, in fact, they look with rather a kindly eye upon the little wretches, for, being case-hardened themselves, they rather enjoy the sufferings of the 'Johnny New-comes.'

Indeed, we remember having read one argument in favour of the mosquitoes in the 'Big B'ar of Arkansaw,' where Jim Doggett is praising up his native State of Arkansas, and which may as well be quoted for the benefit of those who have not seen it:

'"It's a State without a fault, it is,"' said Jim Doggett.

'"Excepting mosquitoes,"' said a Hoosier (an Indianian).

'"Well, stranger, except them; for it ar' a fact that they are *enormous*, and do push themselves in somewhat troublesome. But they never stick twice in the same place; and give them a fair chance for a few months, and you will get as much above noticing them

as an alligator. They can't hurt my feelings, for they lay under the skin; and I never knew but one case of injury resulting from them, and that was to a Yankee: and they take worse to foreigners, anyhow, than they do to natives. But the way they used that fellow up! First they punched him until he swelled up and busted; then he sup-per-a-ted—as the doctor called it—until he was as raw as beef; then, owing to the warm weather, he tuck the *ager*, and finally he tuck a steamboat and left the country. He was the only man that ever tuck mosquitoes at heart that I know'd of. But mosquitoes is natur', and I never find fault with her. 'If they ar' large, Arkansaw is large, her varmints ar' large, her trees ar' large, her rivers ar' large, and a small mosquito would be of no more use in Arkansaw than preaching in a cane-brake."'

This is the only knock-down argument in favour of mosquitoes that I can recollect; but I remember when I first went to Texas, that they feasted upon me and nearly drove me mad; and yet, when I had been in the country a couple of years, I could sit in a bunch of rushes—myself and my very gun-barrels covered with them—and not feel any serious annoyance from their attacks, except when one would make a feint at my eye, just when I was pulling the trigger at a blue-winged teal, going by a point of rushes perhaps sixty yards off, like a streak of greased lightning. When it caused me thus to dodge and miss my bird, I got a little 'riled.'

I remember one night in particular when we mustered fourteen guns, so that we were able to put eight guns on the lower lake—two on the dividing ridge, and four on the upper lake. We were all mounted to ride to the lakes, for they were fully four miles from the house, and many of the young men had come from some distance beyond; but even had there been no distance to go, it is contrary to Texas customs to walk a yard. I succeeded in getting my favourite stand upon the dividing ridge, with my host's son, Jack Mansfield, as a chum, and after we had fastened our horses, we lit our pipes; and taking an occasional pull at a large gourd of grog which we had brought with us, we were enabled to pass the time pleasantly enough till the others had got to their stands, after securing their horses, and were all ready to commence operations. It was nearly full moon, and the night beautifully light. The noise made by the thousands of wild fowl was absolutely deafening.

All at once, bang! went a gun towards the lower end of the lake; and up rose thousands of fowl, with a thundering noise, in that direction. Bang! again went another and nearer gun, and thousands more were on the wing; and in less than two minutes from the time the first gun was fired, everyone of us had 'cut loose' at the dark masses of the birds as they flew around and over us. It was unlike any other firing. I have heard, in a good rookery, pretty quick shooting, but they were

nearly always single shots; but here each man emptied his barrels as quickly as possible, one after the other, into the black clouds of the ducks, widgeon, and teal. Down the lakes, and up them, and around, flew the frightened fowl; and out of the rough reeds and sedge, two sharp flashes, followed by heavy roars, could be seen and heard from the different stands—the flashes being distinctly visible long before the reports were heard, although these depended upon the distance as to the interval between them.

Away far off could be heard the swift beating of a thousand pinions. The rushing sound comes nearer and nearer. All at once, the wiv-wiv-wiff noise of the air is getting close to us. Presently it is over our heads. We wheel round upon our heels, and Jack Mansfield and myself discharge our double *petararos* after them and up their feathers. Dull thuds, where they hit the ground—loud splashes, where they plump into the water,—tell us that our shots have told. We do not stir, however. Morning must come before we think of bagging our game. So we load up again quickly, take a nip at the grog-gourd, re-fill our pipes, and empty our guns every three minutes, as long as the ammunition holds out. Every now and then, visits are paid to our saddles. Upon the horns (pommels), large cows'-horns filled with powder are tied, whilst behind the cantles are bags of shot; so we renew our ammunition through half the night till all is expended, and when our

shoulders have become tolerably sore from the constant percussion of our guns—long before day all have shot away the whole of their powder and lead, and we rendezvous on the ridge—tin cups are drained of the remnants of the different grog-gourds, pipes puffed, and opinions hazarded as to the haul the morning will give us. At daylight, an old cypress 'dug out' is drawn out of the sedge, where it has been concealed and launched; two men take their seats in it; one paddles, and the other retrieves, till the boat is loaded, when the game is brought ashore, and two others take their places, and in time all the birds visible upon the water are collected and counted. Hundreds of the wounded have concealed themselves in the sedge, in the rushes, or have wandered out into the prairie grass to die on the one side, or into the forest on the other; and how many have been destroyed of course we never know, but those collected we count, and then tie upon our saddles to carry home. The total of this night's work is 347 birds, or 24 apiece and 10 over; and we feel confident that not more than one-third has been brought to book.

Rather than be a spoil-sport I have joined in these flight-shooting parties; but it always went against the grain, for I dislike beyond everything to kill and then lose a head of game; but here retrievers were out of the question, as instead of bringing us our birds they would have furnished late suppers to the alligators.

There are several Rails to be found in the winter in Texas, from the Great Red-Breasted Rail (*Rallus elegans*) to the least, or Little, Rail (*Rallus minutus*), the commonest being the Clapper Rail (*Rallus crepitans*), so much pursued in the Carolinas and Virginia; this bird, by the way, is often called *Rallus Virginianus*.

Coots (*Fulica Americana*) are common, hardly a pond or a reed-bed near a river failing to harbour one or more.

The Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius longirostris*), as well as several lesser curlews, are found the year round on the southern coasts, and though despised by the natives, they furnish a *plat* which is not despised by the less prejudiced Britisher.

The naturalist will find other birds which, though not exactly game, are worth his attention. Amongst these are the Great Wood Ibis (*Tantalus loculator*), or Priest-Bird, so called on account of his white plumage and the black points to his wings, which make the bird, when at rest, appear disguised in a surplice with the black band depending from the shoulders and hanging in front. They are very fishy in flavour, and therefore of no use for the table.

The White Ibis (*Ibis alba*) frequents only the streams which meander through the forests, as it loves shade.

Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea Ajaja*) is found in all the prairie ponds in flocks of from ten to fifteen, and as it

is easily approached by horsemen, specimens of this beautiful bird can be easily obtained.

The Blue Heron (*Ardea Americana*), the Shushuga of the Indians, as it frequents the prairie sloughs and streams, would give rare opportunity to the British falconer who would carry to that paradise of falconers a few trained hawks.

This list, however incomplete, will give some idea of the wild fowl in the South, and will well repay the Old World sportsman who may choose to visit it. And, after all, who can wish for a wilder, freer, and more independent existence? The world is all before him where to choose. He wanders over the prairies or through the forests—where he likes—and fishes the lake or stream with no one to say him nay. Hungry, he gathers his fuel, kindles a flame, and cooks his venison, wherever he happens to be. Tired, he pitches his camp, stakes out his horse to graze, feeds his dogs, and, his pipe finished, he rolls himself in his blanket and sleeps soundly.

The naturalist or the sportsman, I repeat, would be well repaid for a visit to the sunny South, in health, whether he came in search of *specimens* or *sport*.

It is all very well for pious, white-chokered respectability to call naturalists and sportsmen 'roving vagabonds.' The hunter knows that it is said enviously, and that the never-satisfied shekel-collector would

willingly part with half of his pelf to be able to lead such a life 'under the green wood tree.'

Like other walks in life, however, the apprenticeship must be served when young, or it will never half be learned if taken to too late, when the eye has become sluggish, the foot slow, and the arm soft for want of vigorous use.

Who can be more independent? No landlord demands his rent, no tax-collector troubles you with his unwelcome visits, nor is your water or gas turned off because the rates are not paid. The conventionalities of civilised life, which bind you as with steel bands, are dispensed with; for why should a man dress to dine by himself at a camp-fire? And his morning calls are made more satisfactorily upon the deer and wild turkeys than they would be in heated drawing-rooms, twaddling over the last ball or the new opera.

A wife, man's 'greatest blessing here below,' would be *one* too many in the woods, and so the hunter is spared those little ebullitions of temper to which sometimes earthly angels give way, and he is left with no one to quarrel with but himself, and as his life is spent in healthy toil, his mind free from carking cares, his temper is always even and good.

The world owes not a little to the restless temperament which produces hunters and travellers; it has produced a Burton, a Speke, a Grant, and last, though equal to

either, a Baker, who has now completed the discovery of the Nile. Hosts of other Nimrods might be named, who, led into wild regions, less by the pursuit of science than of game, have made important discoveries.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE ALLIGATOR.

*Description.*—Body long and thick, protected by regular transverse rows of bony plates; head long and flat, the mouth extremely large, extending behind the eyes, and furnished in each jaw with a single row of teeth; the tongue very short and fleshy; it is attached to the lower jaw throughout its whole extent; ears closed externally. The tail is long and taper, strongly compressed on both sides, and surmounted towards its origin with a double series of keel-like plates, which gradually converge towards the middle of the tail, there uniting and forming a single row to the extremity. On the hind-feet are four toes, more or less perfectly united with membranes; the forefeet have five long and separate.

*Size.*—It grows to the length of fourteen or fifteen feet.

THE alligator, properly so called, inhabits the fresh waters of the Southern States of America. According to the account of Messrs. Dunbar and Hunter, they encountered one as high as latitude 32½° N., but its particular and special haunts are the rivers, lagoons, and swamps, of Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas; preference being given to a stagnant pond, or sluggish creek, rather than a swift running stream or river.

In some districts they may be seen in numbers, protruding their long snouts through the leaves of aquatic plants, as they watch for their prey; sometimes basking in the sun on the bank, or floating on the surface of the water. They are seen ashore more during the hottest part of the day than at any other time, as during the night they are actively employed in catching fish.

Some idea of the general appearance of the alligator, can be easily formed; yet the backwoodsmen of America, who have killed dozens—perhaps scores of them—know very little of the manner of life of the scaly monsters. If you ask for information from a regular 'swamper'—an amphibious man, who, from choice or necessity, has fixed his abode in the swamps about the mouths of the Mississippi, amongst creatures which in many points he resembles—he will give you anything but a satisfactory reply.

'What does an alligator look like?' you might ask.

'Mighty like an old log,' the squatter would reply.

'What do they live on?'

'Whatever they can get hold of; and when there's nothing to be had, they will go without.'

Nor has he anything further to say than that it grows ten, fifteen, or thirty feet in length, but he—the squatter—never took the trouble to measure one.

The name alligator has been applied by the British settlers in the Southern States to a species of reptile resembling, in many respects, the crocodile of Egypt.

By some etymologists the name is supposed to be derived from the Spanish term *el legarto*, while others assert that it is a corruption or modification of the Indian word *legateer*.

The alligator does not differ in any important respect from the crocodile of the East, though, of course, there are a few minor distinctions. In the opinion of Cuvier it is not a distinct genus, but a sub-genus of crocodile, differing from the last-named animal in habitat, but agreeing with it in all the essential parts of its structure and economy.

The alligator lives and thrives best in dense swamps, where stagnant water, confined air, and decaying vegetation engender a foul miasma that would destroy almost anything save the poisonous snake and the great water lizard. As his thick armour defends him from all weapons except the rifle bullet, he moves about his domain without experiencing a sensation of fear. The vast boa constrictor might twine his coils in vain attempts to crush him, the rattle-snake would waste its poison long before its fangs penetrated that scaly hide, while even the American wild hog, or peccary—an animal which fearlessly attacks and destroys snakes of all kinds—gives the alligator a wide berth. Nor is it the slightest use for a mosquito, or any stinging insect, to buz round and attempt to torment him; he will simply open his mouth and catch the little torments by hundreds, seeming to enjoy the sport rather than otherwise.

In many parts of the Southern States men have so far conquered their antipathy towards these reptiles as to tame them, and keep them in confinement. In this semi-domestic state, the beast is said to exhibit more intelligence than would be expected from its appearance.

An alligator was once the cause of a very curious case being tried in New Orleans. A young lady brought an action against a neighbour for keeping an alligator in his yard, asserting that the beast was of extraordinary size and ferocity, that she had frequently occasion to enter his premises, and that, whenever compelled to do so, she was in fear of her life. The defendant, who had been arrested, being required to plead, stated that he kept the animal as a kind of house-dog, or night watchman, and that, unless provoked, it was a quiet peaceable reptile; furthermore, that the plaintiff had been in the habit of teasing the alligator, and exciting his anger by tickling him in the ribs with a long pole, throwing brickbats at him, and on one occasion going so far as to sear his back with a red-hot iron. Upon this, the defendant was discharged, while the lady was bound over to keep the peace towards the alligator and its owner.

The reporters of the New Orleans press do not inform us whether the alligator wept when its back was seared with hot iron; but we are able to assert, that, although Shakspeare informs us that the 'tears of it are wet,' their lachrymal fountains have been sought in vain by cruel,

though somewhat scientific, planters, who have actually squirted the juice and blown the smoke of tobacco into their eyes in order to test the truth of the old fable.

Very few of the backwoodsmen, even if they kill an alligator, trouble themselves to measure or examine it, and thus the reports with regard to its size are very conflicting. A gentleman, owning a plantation on the Red River, where alligators are very numerous, offered a reward of one hundred dollars to anyone who would bring him, dead or alive, an alligator twenty feet in length. Although the game was plentiful, and there was no lack of hunters, the reward was unclaimed, though I have no doubt it might have easily been obtained by anyone willing to devote a little time to the pursuit.

A man one morning hauled a live alligator which measured fifteen feet in length into the market-place at Galveston. He had taken the animal on the borders of a lake just below the town. A yoke of stout young oxen was required to drag the team along; but I am certain I have seen specimens of greater length.

In the breeding season the male alligators—bulls they are called—utter a loud bellowing which can be heard for miles; by listening very attentively, a perceptible vibration of the air can be felt. This sound will give no idea how far distant the listener may be from the reptile; for, while at one moment the sonorous bass rolls out clear and distinct as thunder, the next moment

it will die away in a strange mysterious cadence, which harmonises with the dark gloom of the wild woods. This is the love-song of the alligator, and strange emotions it will sometimes awake in the bosom of the lonely hunter as he lies by his fire in the forest glade.

When several of them inhabit a lake, they may be heard to grunt much like the breathing of a fat pig. If penned up in a corner, or made angry, they will hiss with the vigour of a dozen geese.

The alligator is produced from an egg; the female lays thirty or forty in one place, which she covers with reeds and grass, or with sand, and then leaves them to be hatched by the heat of the sun. She never, however, moves very far from this nest, but endeavours, in its clumsy manner, to guard it from intruders. Vultures and other birds eagerly suck these eggs, and as soon as the young leave the shell, they are liable to the constant attacks of cranes, who evince a decided fondness for young alligator. The old 'bulls,' either from hunger or jealousy, or some other cause, destroy their own offspring; were it not so, the rivers of the South would be choked up with these hideous monsters.

The eggs of the alligator vary in size, most probably according to the age and size of the animal which produces them; they are longer and larger altogether than a hen's egg. It very often happens that two, three, or four females make use of one nest and lay their eggs together.

Frequently, while hunting on the coast regions of Texas, amongst the creeks and marshy pools, which are rather plentiful towards the Gulf of Mexico, I have seen low long-looking haycocks which, on inspection, proved to be the nests of alligators. More than once I have intruded rather rudely upon the old one, who has at once shuffled off into the neighbouring creek, leaving a very strong smell of musk behind.

The female alligator is said to be a very tender and careful mother: at least so says Chateaubriand, who, I am afraid, had more hankering after poetical effect in his writings than the habits of the beast, as it is to be found in the swamps of Texas, would justify. His words are:—

'Whatever may be the apparent deformity of the alligator, they possess many traits of divine goodness.

'It is a miraculous and touching contrast to see an alligator make her nest and lay her eggs, and, after the little monsters are hatched, to notice the solicitude which the dam displays for her family. The amazon keeps vigilant watch while the fires of day glow upon them. As soon as they are hatched, the mother takes them under her protection, leads them to the river, bathes them in the running waters, teaches them to swim, catches fish for their subsistence, and protects them from the males, who would devour them as food.'

This is a very fine description of the affair, and it

may be perfectly true. But the following reasons incline me to think otherwise.

In the first place, if the female alligator were to exhibit such care and fondness as Chateaubriand ascribes to her, the old lady would, after a time, find herself sadly bothered, for generally the young brood are not all hatched at the same time. Days, and sometimes weeks, elapse, between the respective appearances of the first and the last, and during this time the youngsters would suffer all kinds of evils, as indeed they do, while the mother watched by the remaining eggs. I have frequently seen them of various sizes, from four inches up to a foot in length, and I amused myself by pinning them to the ground with a forked stick, and watching their spiteful pugnacious looks and attitudes.

As for the young alligators requiring any tuition in the art of swimming, I should fancy it would be about as necessary to place a cork jacket on the body of a young duck, or to give a frog bladders with which to buoy himself up.

The teeth are of different sizes, though each jaw contains an equal number. As a general rule, a long tooth and a short one will be found alternately. These teeth are hollow within, and are successively pushed out by others as the animal increases in size. This shedding of the teeth is believed to take place every year, and if you knock one off, the young tooth will be found underneath. The hunters frequently carve these

teeth into very pretty little trinkets, making powder-measures with which they charge their rifles, hanging them round their necks with a buckskin thong.

The alligator uses his long flexible tail not only to assist him in his rapid movement through the water, but as an offensive and defensive weapon. I have often witnessed its great power. While hunting one day in company with a man named Steadman, amongst some tall flags which grew along the banks of a small bayou, my companion observed some deer feeding upon the other side of the creek. He at once determined to try and get a shot at them from the shelter of the flags on the other side, and for that purpose dismounted, handing me the bridle of his horse to hold, while he waded through the mud and water. I waited impatiently expecting to hear his rifle; but in a few minutes I saw him returning with a corpse-like countenance and a limping gait. The unlucky hunter told me that he had by accident stepped upon or touched an alligator, who had resented the unintentional insult by a severe blow with its tail. Several days passed before he recovered from the effects of that knock-down blow.

On another occasion an alligator had been shot, and was supposed to be perfectly dead, when an inexperienced hunter, wishing to test the strength and hardness of its scaly plate-armour, attempted to drive his knife into the animals foreshoulder. Round came

the tail, as if galvanised, to defend the wounded shoulder, making a terrific sweep. A stout sapling, which stood in the way, was instantly snapped off, and so would have been the legs of the thoughtless hunter, had he not fortunately stood upon the opposite side to that where the blow had been struck.

On paying a visit to Steadman, the hunter above-mentioned, who, by-the-bye, was my first tutor in prairie-shooting, we were both aroused from our *siesta* one hot day by the terrific cries of a pig. Of course we started up to see what was the matter, and upon reaching the door of his cabin discovered that the noise proceeded from an old sow, which was coming from the reeds of a pond at no great distance from the house. When the animal drew near, we saw that a large triangular piece of skin, reaching from her ribs to half-way up the hip, had been cut from the flesh as clean as though a knife had performed the operation, and was dangling about with every motion of the animal. Steadman quickly informed me that it had been done by a blow from the tail of an alligator, and, furthermore, that these reptiles are very partial to pork.

If hog's flesh is not to be obtained, dog's flesh will do as well, or better. In the chase of bear or deer the hounds very frequently take to water after the game, and should any alligators be at hand, the pack will suffer severely, for the reptile is knowing enough to keep a good look-out as soon as it hears the baying

of the dogs. Stories are told of alligators being outwitted by clever dogs, who would stand on the banks, and, keeping up a continual barking till the reptiles were all assembled in anticipation of the feast, would then run away and cross in safety a few hundred yards lower down. But this must be taken 'cum grano salis.'

The alligator possesses a keen scent, and will, if it has a chance, rob the hunter of his game. During my sojourn with my friend Steadman, we had once gone out in his boat to a stream known as Hall's Bayou, where for some time we fished in its sluggish waters, but growing tired of this tame sport, we fastened the boat to the bank, and went out on the prairies to look for deer. In a short time I had the good fortune to drive a fawn out of a clump of thick bushes; a charge of buckshot stopped its progress, and I carried my prize back to the boat, which was a tolerable-sized one, half decked, and used by the hunter to carry fish and game to market at Galveston, as well as to convey to his cabin whatever goods he required at home.

Feeling rather warm and fatigued, I indulged in a 'big drink' of cold grog, and, after arranging the sails so as to form a canopy over me (for the sun was very powerful), fell fast asleep upon the deck. I know not how long my slumbers lasted—not long I believe—but I was suddenly roused by a sensation as though something were pulling at my coat tails, which had

hung down over the edge of the boat, and attempting to drag me into the water; at the same time I heard a scratching noise. Peeping over the side of the boat I saw a large alligator trying to reach my coat with its claw, but it happened to be at too great a height above the water. I seized my gun, and prepared for war, but the noise made in cocking the weapon frightened the ugly reptile; it sank down into the depths of the water, along with a companion which had been watching its motions. I informed my companion, Steadman, of what had occurred when he returned a few minutes after.

'It was the blood of the fawn that drew them here,' said he, when he had heard my tale; 'and your being so motionless made them attempt to get it. If you will lie down just as you were for a few minutes, I dare say I can get a shot at them; it is almost certain that they will try again for the venison.'

I lay down on my back as desired, and remained perfectly motionless for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then I heard the report of Steadman's rifle, and a great splashing about in the waters of the bayou told me that his bullet had reached its mark. The reptile went to the bottom dead; they always sink when killed in the water, and remain beneath the surface till decay takes place; but we never saw it again.

The legs of the alligator are feeble; they seem awkwardly set on, and are disproportionate to the size

of the body, not being of greater thickness than the arm of a boy ten years of age. They can be easily held, so that the animal cannot withdraw them from the grasp; and thus no very great stretch of imagination is required to believe the story, in which a man is represented as mounted on the back of an alligator, and using, as a bridle, the two forelegs, which he had drawn up over the reptile's back.

The principal food of the alligator is fish, of which they devour thousands. In catching their food, the tail is a great adjunct to the mouth. The body of the alligator being placed in the proper position, at a suitable distance from the shore, assumes a curved form when the fish have come between him and the land, while the tail is run aground, and the huge jaws are opened under water. The only chance of escape for the poor fish is to run the gauntlet of that fearful mouth—a very poor chance indeed, for few have the good luck to get away.

If any animal, which the alligator seeks for prey, happens to be standing on the banks of the river or pond which it inhabits, the reptile will at once swim noiselessly towards it, occasionally bringing its head above the surface, to make sure that the victim has not been alarmed. When within striking distance it will suddenly rise, and, whirling round its tail with lightning velocity, it seldom, if ever, fails to bring the victim within reach of the wide jaws.

Many tales have been told by travellers of the ferocity of the American alligator; but of these stories few have been authenticated. A man dipping up water from a lake has had his arm seized and crushed in the jaws of a half-grown alligator; and children, playing by the side of shallow streams, sometimes fall victims to the rapacity of the reptile, but it is generally harmless. In some parts of the South, women and children will fearlessly bathe where the alligators are known to be numerous, exhibiting no fear whatever beyond splashing the water with their hands to drive the reptiles away. A hunter, while chasing a wounded deer in the neighbourhood of Baton Rouge, suddenly found himself in the midst of a number of alligators, which seemed to regard him with the utmost indifference; not only manifesting no desire to devour him, but also appearing to have no idea of fear.

Although the head of the alligator appears at first sight most hideous and repulsive, it is in reality wonderfully made, and has many beauties in it that would escape the notice of the casual observer. Its eyes, which resemble those of a Chinaman in shape, are really splendid, and when poets are tired of their old similes, they may find a new one in the eyes of the alligator. The construction of the jaws is wonderful. Their extreme length would render them very liable to fracture if they were of solid and continuous bone, as is the case in most animals. But, to provide against such accidents,

they are composed of elongated sections, bound firmly together by strong sinews, like the many springs of a cross-bow A gentleman, whose word was generally believed, once asserted that he had seen the jaws of an alligator which, while the animal was alive, must have possessed a gape of at least five feet.

It would be quite impossible to form any idea of the habits of the alligator from a study of the animal in a state of captivity. Job himself could not be more patient and gentle under affliction than this ugly reptile. A naturalist, less humane than curious, once permanently fastened open the mouth of one, and the animal seemed perfectly satisfied to gape away its existence; he then fastened it in the most helpless manner, and then it made not the slightest resistance. After that he tried to drown it by sinking it beneath great weights under water, and still it remained passive. Another experiment was to cram it with food, even going so far as to thrust the huge meal down the animal's throat, where it remained for several days without being acted upon by the organs of digestion. By way of counteracting any evil that might have ensued from this, the worthy man deprived it of all food for a space of several weeks; but the alligator refused to die, actually increasing in size and fatness. Had it been well fed, it would in all probability have gone into a decline.

Sometimes, after having been most terribly wounded, the alligator will escape, full of life and vitality, while

at other periods, a scratch, which would scarcely injure an infant, will be sufficient to kill it. At certain periods it feeds with the voracity of a shark, and then will for months refuse to touch food, and all this with no visible reason. The closest study of the alligator will give no idea of its desires, habits, or appetites.

The first movement of the alligator on being attacked is to crouch down with its head close to the ground. In this position it watches the intruder, till he finds that the enemy is determined to make it a fight or a race. Then, when anger begins to be in the ascendant, it rises to its feet, gradually arches up its scaly back, and hisses like a flock of geese with sore throats, or rather like the expiring notes from the forge-bellows of a blacksmith.

It may be described as a straightforward animal, inasmuch as it never turns aside out of its way for friend or foe. If the hunter meets one in a narrow pathway, he must either kill it or turn about himself. A gentleman, who sported in a long canoe on the waters of a lake, was just settling himself down in the craft when he saw a large alligator with its head towards him, evidently about to escape, if it could. The gentleman hesitated a moment, but he knew the invariable rule, and after standing for a moment with his feet on the boat's sides, like a second Colossus of Rhodes, thinking that the intruder would pass between his legs, he sprang over into the water from the side of the canoe, just as

the alligator dived from the bows, seeming very much pleased at being allowed to make his escape.

During a stay at the town of Columbia on the Brazos river, I walked on a hot October day (in Texas, October is rather a hot month) to some lakes about six miles from the town, in pursuit of wild fowl. After some sport, I came across an alligator, which was lying asleep on a sand-bank, between twenty and thirty yards from the edge of the lake. The brute was ten or eleven feet in length, and I determined to have some fun with him. First of all, I disturbed his quiet nap by giving him a gentle tap on the nose with a cedar branch as thick as my wrist. Not much liking such treatment, he opened his jaws and treated me to a loud hiss, afterwards closing his mouth with a noise resembling the snap of a large steel trap. A second time I touched him on the nose, and, when his huge mouth opened, thrust my long pole into the aperture. In a moment he smashed the stout branch into chips no bigger than lucifer matches, and then gave another and louder hiss. He looked rather dangerous, and it struck me that if he were to charge me on his way to the lake, as he seemed inclined to do, I might get an ugly blow from his tail; so I poured the contents of one barrel of my gun into his head, and left him dead on the sand.

The following account of an alligator *battue* on a large scale may have some interest for the reader:—

'Some years ago, a gentleman in the southern part

of Louisiana, on opening a plantation, found, after most of the forest trees had been cleared off, that in the centre of his land was a boggy piece of low soil nearly twenty acres in extent. This place was singularly infested with alligators. Amongst the first victims that fell a prey to their rapacity were a number of hogs and fine poultry. Next followed nearly all of a pack of fine deer-hounds.

It may easily be imagined that this last outrage was not passed over with indifference. The leisure time of every day was devoted to their extermination, till the cold of winter rendered them torpid, and buried them up in the mud.

The following summer, as is usually the case, the swamp, from the intense heat, contracted in its dimensions; a number of artificial ditches drained off the water, and left the alligators little else to live in than mud, which was about the consistency of good mortar. Still the alligators clung with singular tenacity to their ancient homestead, as if perfectly conscious that the coming fall would bring rain.

While they were thus exposed, a general attack was planned and carried into execution, and nearly every alligator destroyed. It was a fearful and disgusting sight to see them rolling about in the thick sediment, striking their immense jaws together in the agony of death.

Dreadful to relate, the stench of these decaying bodies in the hot sun soon produced an unthought of evil.

Teams of oxen were used in vain to haul them away; the progress of corruption, under the influence of a tropical sun, rendered the attempt useless.

On the very edge of the swamp, with nothing exposed but his head, lay one huge monster, evidently sixteen or eighteen feet in length; he had been wounded in the *mêlée*, and made incapable of moving, and the heat had actually baked the earth around his body as firmly as if he was embedded in cement. It was a cruel and singular exhibition to see so much power and destructiveness so helpless.

We amused ourselves by throwing various things into his great cavernous mouth, all of which he would grind up between his teeth. Seizing a large oak rail we attempted to run it down his throat, but it was impossible; he held it a moment as firmly as if it had been the bow of a ship, then with his jaws he crushed and ground it to fine splinters.

The old fellow had his revenge; the dead alligators were found more destructive than the living ones, and the plantation for a season had to be abandoned.

The alligator possesses, along with snakes and some other animals, the power of existing for a considerable space of time without food. This is one of its greatest peculiarities, and would be disbelieved by many, were there not numerous authenticated cases on record. At New Orleans, an alligator was kept in a dry yard for six months, during that time receiving

neither food nor water; at the end of that time it seemed not to have suffered in the slightest degree from the enforced fast, but was as strong and lively as ever.

Others have been packed up in cages and sent long journeys by railroad and steamboat, in some instances all the way to Germany; and, though living during all that time—in one case a period of five months—on nothing but faith and fresh air, reached the consignees in as good condition as when dragged from the torpid waters of their native bayou.

The alligator hunter, who wishes to have good sport, should provide himself with a small dog or pig, the reptile being excessively fond of both animals. He will never fail to draw them to the surface of the water by making the animal utter cries of distress, even though he had fished in the same pool for a whole day without even catching a glimpse of one. When hogs are kept by the settlers in the neighbourhood of a river, the young roasters very rapidly disappear. Sometimes the old porkers will give battle to the invader of their homes, but they have very little chance against an antagonist which is shunned by nearly all the animal kingdom with the exception of man.

Even the bear sometimes falls a victim to its prowess. If the reptile can once fairly seize the bear, it will hold him under water and drown him.

I have never heard of a fight between the American

buffalo and the alligator; but as the native rajahs in the East Indies have combats between wild oxen and crocodiles—in which the former are generally victorious, goring their enemy to death—I fancy there can be little doubt as to the result of a conflict between the *Crocodilus Lucius* and the fierce American wild bull.

A Southern gentleman, who was once an eye-witness of an encounter between a black bear and an alligator, has given the following vivid description of the combat:—

'While fishing on the banks of a beautiful stream in Western Louisiana, I was startled by the roaring of some animals in the cane-brake close by, who were apparently getting ready for action. These notes of warlike preparations were succeeded by the sound of feet trampling down the canes, and scattering the shells on the ground.

'Rushing to the trysting-place, or field of battle, there, instead of being, as was supposed, two prairie bulls, mixing impetuously in the fray was a large black bear raised upon his hind legs, his face besmeared with white foam, sprinkled with blood, which, dropping from his mouth, rolled down his shaggy breast. On a bank of snow-white shells, in battle array, was bruin's foe—a huge alligator.

'He appeared as if he had just been dipped in the Teche, and had emerged like Achilles from the Styx, with an invulnerable coat of mail. He was standing on tiptoe, his back curved upwards, and his mouth—where

no tongue was visible—open to its greatest extent, displaying his wide jaws, two large tusks, and rows of teeth. His tail, six feet long, raised from the ground, was constantly waving about like the arm of a prize-fighter, to gather force; his big eyes, starting from his head, glared upon bruin, while at times he uttered loud hissing cries, and then roared like a bull.

'Bruin, though evidently baffled, had a firm look, which showed he had not lost confidence in himself. If the difficulty of the undertaking had once deceived him, he was preparing to go at it again.

'Accordingly, letting himself down upon all fours, he ran furiously at the alligator, which, being prepared for him, threw its head and body partly round, to avoid the onset, and met bruin half-way with a blow of the tail, that sent him rolling on the sands and shells. But the bear was evidently not to be scared by one defeat.

'Three times in succession he rushed at the alligator, and was as often repulsed in the same manner, being knocked back by each blow just far enough to give the alligator, before he returned, time to recover the swing of his tail. The tail of the alligator sounded like a flail against the coat of hair on the bear's head and shoulders, but bruin bore it without flinching, still pushing on boldly, in the hope of coming to close quarters with his scaly foe.

'Finally, he made his fourth charge, with a degree of dexterity which those who have never seen this appa-

rently clumsy animal exercising, would suppose him incapable of. This time he got so near to the alligator before the tail struck him, that the blow came with but half of its usual effect. The alligator was upset by the charge, and before it could recover its feet, bruin had grasped him round the body below the forelegs, and holding him down on his back, seized one of the reptile's legs in his mouth. The alligator was now in a desperate situation; he attempted in vain to bite, for his neck was so stiff that he found it impossible to turn his head round.

'Seized with desperation, the huge amphibious beast gave a loud scream of despair; but, being by nature a warrior both 'by flood and field,' he was not yet entirely vanquished. Writhing his tail in agony, he happened to strike it against a small tree which grew near the edge of the bayou, and aided by this purchase, he made a convulsive flounder, which precipitated himself and bruin, locked together, into the river.

'The bank from which they fell was four feet high, and the water below seven feet in depth. The tranquil stream received the combatants with a loud splash, then closed over them in silence. A volley of ascending bubbles announced their arrival at the bottom, where the battle ended. Presently bruin rose again, scrambled up the bank, cast a glance back at the river, and then, all dripping, made off to the cane-brake.'

Another kind of alligator rarely found is the *Croco-*

*dilus Sclèrops*, or spectacled alligator, so named from the peculiar formation of the head around the eyes, which gives it the appearance of wearing glasses. The jacare, as it is called, is not to be found in the United States, its haunts being chiefly the tropical regions of Brazil, Surinam, and other parts of South America, where it grows to a large size, and is said to be fierce in its habits. Of this animal, however, it is not my place to speak, inasmuch as I have only to do with the alligators of Texas and other sunny states, where this saurian of the swamps alone reminds us of the gigantic brutes of a long past geological age.

# CHAPTER XVII.

## AMERICAN SNAKES.

### THE RATTLESNAKE—CROTALUS.

*Description.*—General colour greyish, with a number of lozenge-shaped black markings, edged with yellowish white upon the back; the tip of the tail black; the belly yellowish white; at the extreme end of the tail a number of horny rings, or rattles, increasing in number, as is supposed, with the age of the reptile.

*Length.*—They are frequently found over six feet in length.

LUCKY is it for the backwoods' hunter that there are but few species of this venomous genus, and that they are all provided with the rattles, from which they take their name, and with which they give a timely warning to the intruder who may venture too near their haunts. The poison of the rattlesnake is extremely virulent; more so in the hot parts of America than naturalists, who have only seen the reptile in this cold land, can at all realise.

This warning sound has saved many lives; and statistics will go far to prove that, in spite of all our

prejudice against the serpent tribe, the number of human beings actually injured by them is very small. The rattlesnake, like most venomous reptiles, seldom makes an unprovoked attack upon man.

The structure of the rattle found on this class of reptiles is very curious. It has been supposed to consist of a number of bones loosely contained in a horny case, the agitation of which produces the noise. This is not the fact; it is made up of a number of rings received upon each other, and movable; only the first being firmly attached to the last vertebra of the tail.

The number of these rings depends upon the age of the snake, one being added to the rattle every time the reptile changes its skin. Twelve is considered a good number, though there are stories going the round of camp fires, of immense snakes that have been killed with as many as thirty rattles. The noise is produced by the snake shaking its tail, the motion knocking the rings against each other; and the noise is greater or less, according to the quickness with which the tail is moved. If the animal is very angry, it shakes the rattle so violently that it can hardly be seen, and the noise is excessively loud, resembling that which would be produced if a quantity of loose substances were placed in a tube, closed at each end with parchment, and shaken. It is said to be perfectly audible at the distance of a hundred feet; while at other times, when nothing has occurred to excite the snake's anger, it can

scarcely be heard as it makes its way slowly through the grass and brushwood, so that a person might easily come close upon it without observing it.

The head of the rattlesnake is large and flat, and of a triangular shape. It is covered with scales, similar to those on the back; the scales on the muzzle and over the eyes being very large. The mouth is very wide, and the snake is able to swallow animals and birds of a large size, without much inconvenience. Behind each nostril the upper lip is pierced with a little groove. In the upper jaw are placed the deadly fangs, concealed between the external and internal jaws, like the blade of a penknife in its sheath. The fangs are curved like the claws of a cat, and are frequently half an inch in length; about a tenth part of an inch from the point is an orifice, through which the deadly venom is discharged. The gland which contains the poison is at the base of the tooth, and on examination will be found two or three drops of a fluid, which much resembles clear honey in appearance. This poison bag is so connected with the hollow part of the fang, when it is in a state of erection, that a very slight pressure or resistance forces it through the orifice with considerable violence into the wound made by the point. The rattlesnake cannot be fairly said to bite its victims; but, opening its jaws to their widest extent, it throws its head forward, striking the fangs like hooks into the unhappy object of its rage, and driving the

poison into the wound, like the arrows of the Bosjesmen. So strong is the poison, that even vegetables feel its effects when inoculated with it; healthy young plants soon become seared and blighted, as though a flash of lightning had scorched them.

A gentleman, fond of trying experiments, had a dog exposed to the bite of a rattlesnake; the animal died in fifteen minutes. A second dog was then bitten, which expired within two hours; while a third, which the snake was provoked to bite, lived rather over three hours after receiving the wound. Another experiment is on record, in which a dog was killed in thirty seconds, and another in four minutes, and some time afterwards the same snake died from the effects of his own poison, within twelve minutes, after inflicting a wound with his own fangs.

In the earlier days of the American Revolution, many people looked upon this snake as a fit emblem for the national flag; and until the eagle took its place, it held quite a conspicuous position in the imagination of the public, assuming for a short time an historical interest. Benjamin Franklin, printer, philosopher, and statesman, wrote a very pleasant essay in support of the proposition; and the celebrated Paul Jones, in his journal, says something about such a flag being used on board the ships of the young republic.

In the Northern States the rattlesnake becomes torpid as cold weather approaches, retiring to holes in rocks,

or beneath the roots of trees. Sometimes on the plains they are known to occupy the same domicile with rabbits or the prairie dog. They retire to their holes after casting their skins, and before the autumnal equinox; and there they remain till spring cheers the earth once more. During this time their bite is said to be harmless, as it is most dangerous in thunder-storms, when the air is much charged with electricity.

The Indians, though they dread, and many tribes reverence, the rattlesnake, while living, will yet kill, and even eat him if they have a chance. They watch for one when asleep, and pin his head to the ground with a forked stick. Thus secured, the snake is soon killed, skinned, and cooked.

The Americans sometimes assert that the English, and in fact all nations where the climate is more temperate, have no venomous snakes. Surely, the Americans must forget that the adder is much dreaded in the New Forest, and in fact all over the south coast of England; and that, although its bite seldom proves fatal to man (cases of death are, however, not unknown), numbers of sheep and cattle are every year destroyed by these savage little vipers.

It is, perhaps, the comparative freedom from venomous reptiles — there being only one kind known in England — that makes the Englishman shrink from everything of a snaky appearance, when he visits the jungles of India or the forests of America.

Although he soon becomes accustomed to all kinds of wild beasts, and shows the utmost indifference to them, he can never conquer his aversion to the whole serpent race. Yet the same thing may be said of the human mind everywhere—it recoils with disgust from the presence of snake life.

This terror is, perhaps, one of the most incomprehensible instincts of humanity, for it prevails everywhere, even when it has not been forced upon the mind by experience. No reasoning overcomes it. Perhaps it is founded upon the superstitions of olden times; for, in every ancient nation, we find the serpent taking some position, frequently a very prominent one, in their mythology. Upon all the ancient monuments of Egypt, of Greece, of Persia, of India, and of Arabia, we find the serpent figuring as the type of wisdom and mystery. On the remains of ancient Nineveh, and upon the walls of the old Aztec temples of Mexico, it holds a very similar place. Images of snakes are dug out of the huge mounds on the western prairies, as they are found in the Egyptian caves and mummy vaults.

The ancients had many sublime fancies, and many ridiculous ideas respecting snakes; but most of the fables of the past have been swept clean away by the light which modern science has poured upon them and their haunts; and at the same time the reptiles themselves disappear, or, at all events, decrease in number as

a country becomes populous—a necessary result of the hatred with which they are everywhere regarded, excepting amongst the Africans, by whom they are reverenced, fed, and preserved.

Although snakes have been looked upon as lowest in the scale of animal creation, from the fact of their possessing only a body without members, their structure displays much beauty in its formation, and is better adapted to their haunts, food, and general manner of life, than is that of any other living creature. It moves with ease and freedom, though it has neither legs, arms, wings, nor fins, the work of all those limbs being performed by a modification of the vertebral column. As they move upon their bellies, it is evident that their greatest danger is from above; its joints are therefore so formed, as best to resist pressure in a vertical direction, and the body is so constructed, that in moving the serpent undulates in its movements from side to side. Thus fashioned it can swim or leap, it can wrestle and crush its foe in its gripe, or lift its food to its mouth.

The rattlesnake is said to be viviparous, though I cannot vouch for the truth of the assertion. M. de Beauvois states that he saw the young of the rattlesnake take shelter in the parent's mouth when disturbed; and other travellers have made similar statements.

At all events, the rattlesnake, or any other serpent,

would have no difficulty in performing such a feat, for its jaws are most capacious. They are held together only by strong muscles, so that the snake, if so inclined, can separate them from each other. This arrangement is very convenient, when we recollect that serpents never tear or gnaw their food, but, as a general rule, swallow it whole. The larger kinds, indeed, crush their prey; but even that operation does not render it much easier to swallow, and it often happens that the mouthful is much larger than the jaws between which it is to pass.

But the serpent can not only unhinge his jaws, he can protrude or retract one independently of the other, so that he can push forward one set of teeth and hook them in the prey, and bring up the others until the dainty morsel is wholly engulfed.

Rattlesnakes are said to possess the power of fascination, and to employ that power in the capture of their food. Disputes have long been rife on that point, much having been both said and written in support as well as in condemnation of the theory. The old French traveller, Le Vaillant, relates that he saw a bird, on which a snake had fixed its eyes, trembling violently, and that when the reptile was killed the bird was found dead, from fright, as was supposed, as no wound could be found upon it. In the year 1723, Mr. Paul Dudley gave an account of the rattlesnake, in which is the following passage:—

'A man of undoubted probity, some time since, told me that as he was in the woods he observed a squirrel in great distress, dancing from one bough to another, and making a lamentable noise, till at last he came down the tree and ran behind a log. The person going to see what had become of him, spied a great snake that had swallowed him. And I am the rather confirmed in this relation, because my own brother, being in the woods, opened one of these snakes, and found two striped squirrels in his belly, and both of them head foremost. When they charm, they make a hoarse noise with their mouths, and a soft rattle with their tails, the eye at the same time fixed upon the prey.'

For my own part, I incline to the opinion that rattlesnakes charm their prey; and if a case has never chanced to come under my notice, many stories have been related by persons whose truth is above suspicion. Philosophers who study snakes from stuffed specimens, and write very learned books after seeing the reptile in a bottle of spirits of wine, may perhaps doubt; and there is nothing in the example before them to lead them to believe that snakes have such fascinating manners. They may say that the story arises from the fears and cries of birds and other animals, whose nests or young have been destroyed, and that the anxiety of the parent bird makes it fall an easy prey to the crafty reptile. But all who have seen the reptile in

its native haunts, as I have, must acknowledge that its gaze is painful to encounter, and that even the mental powers of man are apt to grow benumbed when that eye, so full of command and yet so mysterious in its gaze, meets the human vision.

Let no hunter stop to gaze upon the fearful crotalus, or he will experience a strange subtle charm which it will require a most resolute effort to break through. His blood will start back from his heart; he will feel as conscious of the presence of real and imminent danger as though he stood upon the brink of some fearful precipice. The spiral convulsions of the snake will find a response in the whirlings of his own fevered brain; the forked tongue will play before his gaze with increasing rapidity till it seems like a flash of lightning; the continual hum of the rattles will be like a droning music soothing his senses, and its mysterious eyes will glare as openly and terribly as the portals of Dante's *Inferno*. Let him not stop to look upon the death-dealing object; but with well-directed shot sever its head from its body, or with clubbed gun pound that horrid head to jelly.

Nor is this caution needless. There are men who have experienced this strange fascination. A gentleman living in Philadelphia was riding on horseback to visit a friend, when his horse refused to go forward, being alarmed at the presence of a huge rattlesnake that lay right in his path. The gentleman, who had

some slight belief in the power of snakes to fascinate their victims, alighted from his horse with the intention of leading his animal around the object of its terror. While he was doing this the snake coiled itself up and began to sound its rattle, keeping its eye firmly fixed upon the enemy. Its eyes glared with such fire and fury that the gentleman found himself all over in a perspiration, and for a short time was spell-bound and unable to move hand or foot; he could neither advance nor retreat. Happily, his reason was not benumbed, and in a short time mental courage began to conquer bodily fear. Staggering like one in a drunken dream, he approached the reptile, and by a luckily well-aimed blow dashed its brains out on the spot.

The rattlesnake is not the only fascinating reptile, as witness the *St. Louis* (Missouri) *Herald* for the 12th July, 1854. A black snake, more than seven feet long, is there said to have displayed similar powers. And the whole story ends in a fearful tragedy.

In Franklin County, Missouri, lived a little girl, thirteen years of age, along with her parents. She had always enjoyed good health, but was suddenly seen to waste away, till she became a mere skeleton. In the spring months of the year she exhibited a strange propensity to take her meals away from the house, carrying all her food to the banks of a stream near at hand, where she had been known to sit for

hours at a time. The neighbours began to wonder at this extraordinary conduct, and suggested to the father that it would be well if a watch were set upon her movements. This was accordingly done. On a Friday morning the child went out and sat in her usual place by the creek till nearly noon, when she returned to the house and asked for food, upon which a large slice of bread and butter was given her, and she returned to the waterside.

In the meantime the father had stealthily followed his child, and ensconced himself behind some bushes. To his intense horror, he saw a huge black snake slowly lift its head into the child's lap, and receive the food from her hand, exhibiting the utmost greediness, and showing signs of anger whenever the child attempted to taste the food; the poor girl trembling like an aspen leaf all the while. The father uttered a loud groan as he beheld the influence which the monster had gained over the mind of his child. But some slight noise he made alarmed the snake, which glided away into the creek, and was lost to sight. He questioned the child as to why she gave her food to the snake, but she would not, or could not, give any answer.

After a consultation with some friends, it was determined that the girl should not be hindered from going to the creek the following day, and that if the snake made its appearance it should be killed. The child took her food to the creek the next morning as usual,

and in due time the snake made its appearance. The father, who was watching with loaded gun, at once fired, and sent his shot through the reptile's head. The girl at once fell down fainting, while the snake, after rolling and twisting about, died. The girl recovered, but when she saw the monster was dead, swooned again. She once more recovered, but only to fall into convulsions a third time, and finally died without giving any explanation as to the influence the snake had exercised over her. In her last moments she seemed to be in the greatest agony, both of body and mind.

The editor of the paper from which this tale is taken vouches for the correct statement of this strange and horrible fact in the following words:—

'We know that there are many persons who doubt the reality of such fascination, but if they entertain any doubts on this subject hereafter, the relations of this unfortunate little girl can be found, ready and willing to corroborate our statement.'

In Eastern lands, snake charming is a profession of great honour and antiquity, and many surprising tales have been related of their seeming willingness to listen to the voice of the charmer. In the Southern States, many of the negroes seem to me to possess this power over the hideous reptiles; and very few of them would ever kill a snake, giving as a reason, that they should have bad luck afterwards. They seem to be able to

handle snakes with impunity, as the following anecdote will show.

An eccentric physician was desirous of studying the habits of the rattlesnake, and in order that he might do so at his leisure, had a number of the reptiles caught and confined in a large cage, which, for fear of accidents, he always kept in his own bedroom, examining the reptiles every night before he retired to rest, for the purpose of ascertaining that they and the cage were quite secure, and that they had been properly attended to during the day.

One night he returned very late from a party, rather fatigued, and perhaps a little the worse for wine; however, he quite forgot his usual precautions, and jumped into bed without so much as glancing at the cage containing his treasures. But the hot, sultry weather prevented him from sleeping for some time; and as he lay tossing on his couch, a slight noise attracted his attention, which sounded very much like something sliding along the floor. On looking to see the cause—for it was a bright night, and the moon shone right into his room—he saw at a glance that the door of the snakes' cage was open, and that one of the largest of the reptiles was advancing leisurely towards him.

The doctor hardly knew how to act. It is true a loaded gun stood in the corner of the room, but then, for aught he knew, some of the other snakes might be at liberty; and thus he might tread on one of them and

pay the penalty of his rashness. A slight consideration of the matter convinced him that the safer plan would be to lie perfectly still till morning, when the servants would be awake, and this he did, taking the precaution to draw the gauze mosquito curtains as closely around his couch as possible. In the meantime, the snake, after roaming about the room for some time, approached the bed, and in a little while all became quiet.

It seemed many hours, but at length daylight arrived. The doctor listened with impatience, and at length heard the footstep of his black valet approaching the door. The doctor at once called out to him not to enter, but to fetch an old negro who worked on the plantation, and was said to possess a strange power over all crawling things. The valet, on hearing that the snakes were loose, soon brought a venerable Ethiopian, to whom the matter was explained. As soon as the old negro understood, he at once declared himself willing to enter upon the task, expressing a thorough belief and confidence in his own powers. On entering the room he discovered a large snake sleeping very quietly under the bed. The doctor at once ordered him to shoot the reptile, but this the man refused to do, and saying that he could take up the snake without the least danger of being bitten, he began to whistle and sing in a strange tongue, all the while approaching the reptile gradually, till at length he passed his hand over its head in a soothing

manner. At length he lifted up the reptile's head, and induced it to repose upon his arm, without exciting the slightest symptom of anger or fear.

The doctor began to grow rather alarmed for the safety of his servant, and desired him to return it at once to the cage; but the old man was very unwilling to comply. On approaching the cage the snake began to show signs of anger, lifting up its head, hissing, and working its rattles. The negro recommenced his incantations and soothing words, and soon restored the snake to its original calmness. The doctor was more alarmed than ever. It seemed that the negro could not get rid of the reptile, though he had charmed it. The old man, however, had a plan in his head, and called for a sheet; by moving it gently to and fro he soon accustomed the reptile to the sight of the strange object, and by dexterous management slipped the edge of it beneath the snake's body, between its coils and his arm, whistling and singing more vigorously than ever while so doing. When he had the sheet properly adjusted, he skilfully and quickly rolled the reptile up in it, after which a few rapid movements restored it to its old quarters.

The old negro ascertained that all the other snakes had remained in the cage, and after receiving a handsome present from the doctor, retired unharmed. He declared, however, that it would be impossible to

charm that snake again, as he had deceived the reptile by the exercise of his power.

I have several times narrowly escaped from the bites of these reptiles. On one occasion, I made up the number of a party for the purpose of fishing and shooting on a small island, off the coast of Florida. We crossed in a boat, landed at the north end of the island, and fixed our camp in a very pleasant spot, under the shade of a grove of live oak and laurel-bushes on the bank of a small stream, which had its source in a marsh in the centre of the island. The situation commanded a very pleasant view. On one side was the green coast-line of the great continent, where the wave dashed itself into white foam on the sandy beach, with here and there rocks of fantastic shape, and verdure-clad islets; on the other hand was the mighty ocean, stretching away till it was lost in the distance, where wave and sky seemed to mingle together. We shot; we caught fish and oysters; and, when the day was at an end, a good supper was followed by two or three 'goes' of grog beyond the usual allowance.

During the night I felt thirsty, and walked down to the stream two or three times, as did some of my companions. Strange to say, everyone returned with the tidings, that a rattlesnake had been heard not many yards away, and always exactly at the same spot.

As soon as it was light, I once more took my way to

the water for the purpose of bathing and drinking. To my horror, I saw coiled up by side of the path, within twelve inches of where I had stepped, a huge rattlesnake. A single moment I stood, while the creature began to erect its head and spring its rattles; then jumping a yard back, I seized a large stone, which I hurled with all my force at the reptile, cutting him in two. It measured a trifle over six feet in length, with well-developed fangs and poison-bags full of venom. Six or seven times that snake must have been passed and repassed during the darkness of night; yet, by a miracle, we all escaped from its bite.

The food of the rattlesnake consists chiefly of birds, squirrels, and such small game; though it does not despise turkey's eggs. It is incapable of seizing its prey, except when coiled up, ready to spring, and therefore it cannot give chase. This being the case, the snake would be compelled to fast for a very long time, unless it was able to a certain extent to fascinate its prey. All snakes—and the rattlesnake is no exception to the rule—emit a peculiar odour when excited, or angry; and it seems very probable that this strong scent, being directed in a continual current towards the destined victim, exercises a stupifying influence over the poor squirrel, rabbit, or bird, dulling its senses and rendering it unable to escape.

In addition to all this, it has been stated by an American author, that the rattlesnake is unable, or, at all

events, unwilling to take any food without undergoing the preliminary excitement of charming it; and he gives an instance of a gentleman who kept a rattlesnake in a cage for some time without food, and then gave it a rat. The reptile took not the slightest notice of its new companion; and in a short time the couple were on peaceable, if not friendly, terms with each other; and so things continued for two or three weeks. One morning, however, sounds were heard in the apartment where the cage was kept. The gentleman proceeded thither, and saw the snake coiled up, its head raised above the body, its mouth open with the tongue shooting about, while the tail kept up a continual humming rattle. The poor rat seemed to be in the greatest terror, yet kept approaching its deadly foe. When the quadruped was close to it, the reptile darted with lightning velocity, and struck the fatal blow. A few convulsive kicks terminated the rat's existence, and the reptile soon worked it down its capacious throat.

At any time, during the weeks they had lived together, the reptile could have swallowed its companion as it ran about, or slept, upon the floor; but the excitement attendant upon charming seemed necessary before it could do so with pleasure or satisfaction.

Rattlesnakes, as a rule, love woody ground in a dry situation, although one species haunts swampy districts, and is termed the marsh-rattlesnake. It is quite as deadly in its nature as any other member of the family.

In the neighbourhood of most large towns in America, rattlesnakes are very rare. As the ground is cleared, they are killed or driven from their haunts. The hog —an animal which generally accompanies the Anglo-Saxon in his onward march—has proved of immense service in clearing the woods of these noxious reptiles, being, with the exception of man, the most destructive enemy which the snake has to encounter. An old grunter will even trace the snake to its haunt, or den, by the scent, and carry the war into the enemy's camp.

Of course, the snake sounds an alarm the moment it sees or hears the invader, and prepares for action; coiling itself, and brandishing its forked tongue. The hog disregards these hostile looks, and presses boldly forward, sidling up in such a manner, that its fat cheek, presented to the fang of the snake, catches the blow aimed by the enraged reptile. As soon as the foe has exhausted its venom and strength, the hog puts his foot upon the neck of the serpent, and tears its body with his teeth.

If a herd of deer chance to see a rattlesnake, the old buck generally gives battle, though he adopts very different tactics, of a light cavalry order. The buck will trot round and round the snake for some time, seemingly with the intention of confusing the reptile. Suddenly, he will start off to some distance, and, returning at full gallop, spring five or six feet into the air, alighting, with all four of his sharp pointed hoofs,

upon the coils of the snake, and springing aside instantly. If the assault has been performed with precision, the snake will be found cut to pieces.

The black snake attacks the poisonous crotalus in a somewhat similar manner. The rattler coils himself up while the non-venomous creature glides round and round the foe with great rapidity—both combatants hissing like small steam-engines. The rattlesnake attempts to follow the rapid circular movements of its foe, but is unable to do so, and despairingly drops its head to the ground—perhaps feeling a little giddy from such unaccustomed exercise. This is the moment for which the black snake has been watching and waiting; and in a moment it darts in, seizes its adversary by the back of the neck, and then the struggle begins. The black snake throws coil after coil around its foe, as they roll over each other, while the rattlesnake vainly endeavours to extricate himself. In a few minutes the rattlesnake lies motionless. The black snake cautiously uncoils himself, and after giving a triumphant hiss over his foe, disappears from the scene; generally to the banks of the nearest stream.

During the summer months they generally go about in pairs; so that if one is killed the hunter had best look out for the other. This habit is not confined to the rattlesnake. Most venomous species observe the same rule. A negro slave in St. Domingo once took advantage of it to perpetrate a foul crime.

The negro had joined a conspiracy to revolt, but being suspected of lukewarmness in the cause, was commanded to destroy his master's only daughter as a proof of his zeal, or suffer death himself. The rascal accomplished the deed without attracting the least suspicion towards himself. He discovered the haunt of a pair of deadly snakes, and by means of those arts peculiar to his half-savage race, enticed them to the neighbourhood of the house. He then informed his master that he had reason to believe that there was a venomous reptile in the neighbourhood. A reward was offered for its destruction, which was gained by the negro himself, who killed the female snake the following morning. His courage and devotion was highly complimented by the master, and an additional reward given by the daughter of the planter. The moment the negro was unobserved, he set to work to complete his plans. He dragged the body of the dead snake along the ground, through the house into the young lady's bedroom, and allowed it to remain for some minutes between the sheets on the bed. This done, he concealed the snake about his body, and carried it to a distance. Night came, and the surviving snake began to seek its mate. The scent was still on the ground, and the reptile followed it up to the door, and then glided across the hall to the chamber of the planter's daughter. The trail was quite warm; the snake worked its way beneath the coverlet to the place

where the other had been; and when the unfortunate girl moved her hand in her sleep to brush it from her neck, the fangs of the enraged reptile were instantly buried in her throat. The deep sleep produced by a sultry heat was upon her, and she awoke no more. When the parents visited their child in the morning, an offensive, putrid mass of corruption, in which they could hardly recognise the loved countenance, was all that met their sight.

In some parts of the Southern States these snakes are so numerous that it is dangerous to camp out without taking some precaution to guard against them. The camping-ground should be chosen upon an open space away from weeds, bushes, or rocky ground. Some hunters encircle their bivouac with the horse-hair halters which they carry, to protect themselves from the snakes. I know not whether there is any magic or virtue in horse-hair, but the reptiles have never been known to enter the magic circle. They have also a most decided antipathy to the leaves or branches of white ash, and are never found in spots where that plant is abundant. Some hunters, acting upon this hint, stuff their mocassins and boots with the leaves, as a safeguard against the bite of rattlesnakes.

Numerous remedies have been proposed as a cure for their bite—suction, caustics, and internal medicines. The Indians frequently employ the first-named

remedy. They also use some roots and leaves which they say have a good effect. Amongst these latter may be mentioned a root called heart-snake root, as well as a species of chrysanthemum, called Saint Anthony's Cross. These remedies they often carry about with them, and when bitten, chew some, swallowing the juice, while the masticated pulp is applied to the wound.

Catesby, the American traveller, is of opinion that if the Indians recover from the bite, it is more from the slightness of the wound and a good strong constitution, than from the efficacy of the remedies. He states that persons have survived for hours without taking any medicines whatever, when the fangs had not touched any vein or nerve; but that, when the case was otherwise—a vein or artery having been pierced—death ensued in a very short time; on one or two occasions in less than two minutes.

Many persons in the South go about armed with a phial of ammonia, which is considered a good antidote. But the backwoodsmen and hunters—myself amongst the number—place unbounded confidence in unlimited quantities of the best whisky. If a man is bitten, pour glass after glass of the spirit down his throat, till his stomach will hold no more; and in nine cases out of ten, he will appear little the worse for the bite in a day or two. The snake wastes his venom on a man whose blood is diluted with whisky.

The symptoms are a swelling of the body, the tongue becomes inflamed, the mouth is burning, an inextinguishable thirst is felt; the edges of the wound first become gangrened; fearful pains are felt in every part of the body, and continue till death ends the agony of the sufferer.

Those who have been bitten and recover are generally reminded of their lucky escape by periodical aches and swellings, or weakness in the part injured, or by a derangement of the action of the heart.

But, luckily for all American hunters and travellers, cases of rattlesnake bites are extremely rare, being very seldom reported in even the most sensational newspapers of the whole American press. The animal when unprepared for action, *i. e.* when not coiled up, is very slow in its movements, so that man can easily escape from its presence.

Another serpent found in America, and nearly as poisonous as the rattlesnake, is the Mocassin Snake. These are numerous in the swampy grounds of Carolina, Georgia, and other Southern States. In many of its habits it resembles the rattlesnake, though it does not grow to such a size, nor does it possess the warning rattle. Their bite is supposed by the negroes to be incurable. The flesh about the wound mortifies and falls away, the mortification extending gradually over the body. The only method said to be effectual is tying a ligature both above and below the wound, and reso-

lutely cutting the flesh right down to the bone; after which the wound should be cauterised. If the patient survives both the venom and the antidote, he must possess a very strong constitution.

The mocassin snake is seldom known to grow much more than four feet in length, though it is thick in proportion. When provoked, they swell out the body, flatten the neck, and thus cause the head, mouth, and eyes to look very large. They are marked on their skins something in the fashion of a rattlesnake, though not so distinctly. They are of a very dull coppery hue.

I have never known any instance of death from the bite of this snake; and am convinced that if the hunter will exercise caution, and look before he leaps, or steps, he may venture with safety into any part of the American wilderness.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

BLACK BASS; CENTROPRISTES NIGRICANS—RED FISH—WEAK FISH.

The black bass has the appearance of an elongated perch—to which class of fish it properly belongs. The upper part of the body is of a dark olive-green hue, while the belly is tinted with pink. The dorsal fin is a dark grey mixed with blue; the anal fin and tail are marked with irregular spots of greyish black.

A MAN who has been shooting either with rifle or shot-gun for weeks, without any other sport, is apt to think hunting tedious, and to be envious of the disciples of gentle Master Walton, of piscatorial notoriety; and many a hunter, after a month's camp-hunt, desires no better sport (for a day or two), than to catch a few fish.

The sea along the coast, as well as the rivers that water the interior of Texas the beautiful, are provided with fish as plentifully as the forests and prairies are filled with furred and feathered game.

Scarcely any water in the world produces a greater variety of fish than the Gulf of Mexico. Along the

coasts of Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, there is an abundance of deep-sea fishing, which would well repay the piscator for the inconvenience of roughing it a night or two on board a half-decked boat.

The splendid Red-Fish stands at the head of the salt-water list, as the black bass takes the first place amongst the river and lake fishes. It has some resemblance to an English chubb, both in form and in the size of its scales, but differs in its colour, from the pink hue of which the fish has been named. Properly speaking, it is a kind of red mullet; and an Englishman catching one for the first time, would most probably call it by that name. Difference of temperature, as well as greater abundance and variety of food, have made it, in a few minor points, unlike those taken about the coast of this island.

At highwater the red-fish comes towards the shore, and is eagerly angled for by those who know how delicious its flesh is. A prawn, or a very small crab, with the shell broken and claws removed, is used as a bait; at either of these the red-fish bites freely. Before he can be landed he fights hard for life, making an exciting and game struggle, especially if it is a large-sized one. The red-fish is frequently caught, weighing forty pounds.

Another capital fish is a species of sea trout, which all the white men in the South call the 'Weak-Fish.' If cooked as soon as it is caught, its flesh is delicious

eating, but it will not keep—two hours in those warm latitudes being sufficient to commence the work of decomposition in its very delicate flesh.

The weak-fish is brilliantly spotted over all its body, and much resembles in appearance one of our own trout from the river sea. It will bite freely at almost any bait, and when hooked makes quite as desperate a struggle for life as the red-fish. On looking into its mouth, the difference between it and the English trout is at once perceptible, inasmuch as from its upper jaw project two long fangs, resembling the incisors of a squirrel.

The Grey-Mullet is very good eating, and tolerable sport. How many millions of these fish there are in the Gulf of Mexico it is impossible to guess, but I know that by rowing gently at night with a lighted torch in the bow of the boat, they may be attracted in a short time in such numbers as to put the skiff in danger of being swamped. No moth was ever more readily drawn towards a candle, than are these fish towards a light upon a dark night. Flounders are very plentiful, and are splendid eating.

The Drum is a large fish, of the carp species, weighing sometimes fifty pounds; but it is seldom eaten, being very coarse and unsavoury. They are hungry gluttons, devouring every kind of bait with eagerness, though, when hooked, their temper at once changes, and they can be hauled through the water like logs. I once

hooked a fish of this kind which weighed forty-five pounds; it made no more resistance than would be made by a large bunch of seaweed.

Besides these there is the Sheep-Head, a species of perch, which, though its proper home is salt-water, sometimes ascends rivers a little way with the tide. There is also an ugly-looking Flounder (the Stingaree), with a long whip-like tail, at the end of which is a venomous bone with which it sometimes wounds its captor, or an incautious bather who may venture within its reach. For this reason it is always killed when opportunity offers, and sometimes eaten. Plenty of eels may be caught, though they are seldom eaten, on account of a prejudice against their snake-like appearance.

The Oyster-beds are very numerous, and produce most delicious oysters. A large kind of Shrimp, or Prawn, is found about the tidal rivers. These not only serve as bait, but are very nice eating, after having been boiled for about five minutes, with a little salt. The best way to catch them is to take a coarse bag and stretch the mouth of it by means of a cane or vine-hoop, put in it a little Indian-corn meal, and sink it with a weight, having of course a string attached to it. In half-an-hour's time I have found these bags nearly full of the little creatures.

Of fresh-water fish the Bass is the most sporting, and therefore stands at the head of the list. By the by,

this fish is not called bass in the Southern States, although he bears that name in the lakes and rivers of the North. The men of Texas and Louisiana call him the trout. The best way to catch bass is to spin with a minnow, or 'shiner,' a little fish something like a dace. This sport will thus remind the Texan angler of the cold clear streams of England.

The Black Bass is not black, but of a very dark yellow-green colour, shading off into a pink hue beneath the belly. He generally bites well and makes a good stubborn resistance when hooked, and the pleasure of eating almost equals the pleasure of catching him.

They will not (nor will any other fish in Texas, so far as I have been able to discover), rise at a fly, though I have spent many an evening in whipping the waters of some likely-looking streams in the upper country. Yet, I think, it was not from want of knowledge or experience in fly-fishing that I was thus unsuccessful, for in my young days I was much addicted to the sport.

The scenery upon some of the streams far inland is very beautiful. The sky overhead is blue and bright, the banks ornamented with groups of live oak trees, which reflect their graceful forms in the clear stream, while wild grape-vines hang their leaves, and, at proper seasons, their purple clusters, right over the sparkling waters. Here and there, a stately cedar tree casts a dark shadow over the silvery river, while further on is

a cluster of magnolia, with its wax-like flowers and its almost overpowering perfume.

The fish caught in the lower waters are sometimes very large, and at the same time not very nice eating. There is one huge monster called the Alligator-Gar, not to be confounded with the reptile, but, like him, covered with impenetrable scales. This creature is the terror of all the fish in southern waters. His mouth is full of large sharp teeth, like those of the pike. He is a great annoyance to fishermen, frequently seizing fish when hooked, and making off with them in the most impudent manner. Everyone who has a chance kills this ugly fish, although it is never eaten. I saw an alligator-gar that had been caught in the Brazos de Dios River, which weighed one hundred and fifteen pounds. It was eleven feet in length.

Two kinds of Cat-Fish are found—the yellow and the blue—or, as it is more commonly called, the 'mud cat.' They are ugly fish, without scales, and with a very large mouth. The cat-fish has three poisonous bones projecting from its body, so that the fisherman must be very careful while extricating his hook from its mouth. The wound caused by these spikes is very painful, as it festers and forms a nasty sore; in one or two instances lock-jaw has followed. The spikes are one on each side behind the gills, and one upon the back, and are the terminal points of fins.

The cat-fish grow to a large size, and I have seen

one which weighed a trifle over eighty-four pounds. They fed greedily on anything that comes in their way, but in spite of all their coarseness of feeding and voracity they are very good eating, and may be cooked in many ways. 'Cat-fish chowder' is a dish generally recognised and appreciated throughout the Southern States.

In the lakes are several kinds of Perch, the best of which is called the Gaspargeaux. It is a fine silvery fish, and sometimes grows to a weight of fifteen pounds.

In all the rivers of Texas, Soft-shelled Turtles may be caught of all sizes, from an ounce to a hundred pounds in weight. They are delicious, whether made into soup—in true city style—or cut into steaks. While fishing I often found them a great annoyance, as they would take the bait just when they were least wanted. Four gentlemen of my acquaintance while fishing for 'cats,' found the turtles very troublesome, and after a short time they resolved on vengeance. Each man, having caught one, attached the end of his line to its shell, and then, throwing out his bait, held the turtle on his back until another was hooked. A stout stake had been firmly driven into the bank, and as soon as turtle No. 2 was hooked, the line was passed over the pole, and the original captive was sent back into the river on one side the post to drag up the second victim on the other side.

Any angler who is tired of salmon-fishing in Norway,

should try his hand at cat-fish and black bass in the rivers of the South, where he can fish when the streams and lakes of the North are ice-bound. There are no river conservators, or other meddlers, to spoil his sport, and nothing to pay for but hooks and lines. The settlers are open-hearted and hospitable, and if a man cannot make himself comfortable, it is his own fault. Every planter will open his doors to the stranger, and consider any expenses he may be put to amply repaid by the company of his guest.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BEE-HUNTING.

APIS MELLIFICA.

PROPERLY speaking, so small an insect would have no right to be mentioned in a book where nobler game is treated of; but as honey-hunters have brought so much art to bear upon so humble a pursuit, I have thought that a short account might perhaps prove interesting.

The Bee is said to have been the pioneer of the white man across the American continent, as the Indians have noticed that wherever the bee made its appearance, the woodman's axe was soon heard felling the monarchs of the wilderness in its rear.

As the country, however, becomes settled, the wild honey-bee flies further and deeper into the undisturbed forests, so that the backwoodsman, who makes a business of collecting honey for sale, is compelled to follow the bees, and, consequently, the bee-hunter is rarely seen, except when he comes into the settlements to barter his 'plunder' for necessaries.

Spending so much time—often his whole life—alone in the forest, the bee-hunter generally becomes a

superior déer-stalker and turkey-slayer, as well as honey collector; and we never met one yet who did not excel in the 'gentle-craft,'—a hook and line being as invariably wound round his hat, as the bucket and axe are swung at his back, or his trusty rifle across his shoulder.

Like most men who pass much of their lives in the wilderness, the bee-hunter has but little to say for himself. He is a man of action, not of words; and, like the Irishman's Owl, 'a divil to think,' if he lacks eloquence. When he does speak, however, it is to the purpose, as is the custom of most great men, for amongst this backwoods' fraternity men of genius in their way have lived and died, their exploits unchronicled, their names unwritten in the 'book of fame.'

The bee-hunter generally builds his wigwam upon the banks of some stream which is navigable enough to float his canoe, when loaded with two or three casks of honey, the beeswax, and himself, either to some river on which steam-boats ply, when he can trade his 'plunder' to the captain, or else to some settlement, where he can barter with some store-keeper for the necessaries he requires; these being chiefly ammunition, whisky, tobacco, and flour, or corn-meal. Loaded with these and his empty casks, he paddles homewards fully satisfied.

His wigwam, or shanty, is generally of the roughest, being needed only as a temporary shelter; for the practised bee-hunter soon discovers and robs all the

bee-trees within three or four miles around; and he then sets to work to erect a new home, where he can store his sweets till the casks are full for market again.

A combination of prairie, wood, and water, is the paradise of the bee-hunter. The prairie, carpeted with millions of flowers, yields his 'industrious classes' a never-failing supply wherewith to make the honey; the timber furnishes them with hollow trees in which to store it, and the water gives the hunter his highway to a market. In the South and South-west it is nearly perpetual summer, so that the bees are almost always at work; and, except during short 'spells' of cold weather, they are rarely confined to their hives, or bee-gums, as these honey-stores are usually named.

Some of these old bee-gums contain an immense quantity of honey—eight, ten, and sometimes more, gallons being obtained from one tree; and as this was—in the South—generally worth, first hand, to the bee-hunter, a quarter of a dollar the pound weight, honey-hunting furnished a not unprofitable business. Besides this there was the wax; and not unfrequently, when about to go to market, the prudent hunter would kill two or three deer and half-a-dozen wild turkeys to increase his freight; whilst in the winter months wild-fowling, as he went to market, brought him many an extra dollar. I had often heard of bee-hunting, and had seen a negro on a plantation, or an occasional hunter, find a bee-tree, before I met with a professor of

the art. At length I encountered T. S., a man who was supposed to be at the very summit of his profession, a kind of senior-wrangler in bee-hunting.

Like all great minds, T. S. was indifferent to dress. Like a rough diamond he knew his innate value, and did not care to be polished and set, knowing he should lose some precious particles in the process. A frayed and tattered Panama hat graced his head, which, with grease, dust, honey, and occasional showers, was a little of all colours, but none in particular. Around the sides, lengths of fishing-lines were twined, the hooks being stuck in what remained of the brim; and as these were snatched out when required, without regard to the hat's integrity, its raggedness was readily accounted for.

His coat, too, was like the youthful Joseph's, of many colours. What its material had been originally, it would have puzzled the 'bench of bishops' to decide. If it had been cloth, it was now half buckskin; and if it had been buckskin, it was now half cloth. The patches were of all sizes and shapes, from the size of a dollar to that of a frying-pan; whilst the skirts and sleeves, fringed by briars, and thorns, and snags, resembled the scalp-bordered hunting-shirt of an Indian warrior. His inexpressibles were nothing to speak of. Enough certainly remained to swear by; so it is not necessary to say much concerning so little. His shirt was of Nature's manufacture—the same he was born with—and tanned to a fine lasting colour. Buckskin

mocassins, made by himself, graced his feet; and his whole outfit was completed, on this occasion, by his rifle, axe, and bucket with its contents. What these were will be shown presently.

We met by appointment at a spot on the prairie, and after the usual salutations, I expressed a hope that we might find a bee-tree. His reply bespoke the master of his craft.

'Why not? Here's plenty of bees upon the pee-rara; I guess I can line one to its gum.'

The word 'line' was double-Dutch to me, but I had faith, and made no reply to what was evidently a reproof to my implied doubt of his abilities.

He lost no time in commencing operations. Emptying the bucket, he set it on the prairie reversed; then from its miscellaneous contents he picked out a tin saucer, into which he poured a spoonful of honey; then setting it upon the bottom of the bucket, he stepped back a pace and awaited the result, whilst I watched each proceeding with curiosity.

In a few minutes a bee had scented it out, and commenced loading itself with the treasure. T. S. cautiously advanced, and instantaneously covered it with a tin cup, and inspecting the bee, said, 'It's nearly loaded.'

Watching it closely, he dusted it with the sulphur just as it flew, and followed it with his eyes. It was soon lost to my sight; but my companion continued to gaze steadily after it, long after it was invisible to me.

'It's gone straight for that peccan tree,' he said. 'I can see a bee over a mile in a clear day, easy.'

Another bee was served in the same manner, and this took the same course.

'Now we will angle them,' remarked T. S., 'and see how deep the tree is in the forest.' Saying which, he removed his traps higher up the prairie, where his preparations were renewed.

This time the first bee took a course for another point of the forest, and the professor pronounced decidedly that it belonged to a different 'gum.' The next, however, headed a trifle to the right of the peccan tree, and T. S. pronounced himself satisfied that he had 'angled' the bee-tree.

'You see,' said he, 'a bee's a cunning creature, and takes a straight shoot for home when he's ready—what we call "a bee-line;" it's so true and straight, that's where the saying came, you may, no doubt, often have heard amongst us Western-folks. Now, where this last one's line cut the first one's, and the second's at the first stand that I made, we shall find the bee-gum; that's what we call "angling 'em."'

The traps were once more put together. Again the bucket swung upon his back; and we started in the direction of the peccan.

'Don't you sometimes have some trouble to find the tree, even when you have "angled" it so carefully?' I asked, as we walked along.

'No fear. Didn't you see the dust I put on 'em? There will be a pretty muss, I allow, when the other chaps smell the brimstone I made 'em a present of, I guess.'

When we reached the point determined as the situation of the 'gum,' a terrible buzzing met our ears, and it was evident that T. S. had cleverly traced the brimstoned bee's home. Laying aside his *impedimenta*, and swinging his axe with practised strokes, my companion began to cut down the tall forest tree, within which were hidden the wild bee's stores.

Half-an-hour's work sufficed to lay low the patriarch of the forest, and 'let in an acre of sunlight.'

Naturally, the bees were very much astonished and confused as their stronghold fell, and by their united voices proclaimed battle, murder, and sudden death to all their foes; but the experienced hunter speedily lit a fire, and piling upon it plenty of green moss, soon made such a smoke, that the bees were compelled to flee.

As soon as the bees were put to flight, no time was lost in examining the contents. It was a rich one; and T. S., leaving me to keep up the smoke, started off to his hut for a barrel to put it in.

He was most liberal with his prize, and invited me to take a bucketful for myself; but I cared more to see the manner in which it was procured, than for the honey when it was obtained.

It may be said, 'Ah! it was only bees you hunted after all—why not try flies?' I answer, that even this pursuit called into existence qualities that would be useful in far more serious pursuits, and, at any rate, it was an honest one.

# APPENDIX.

THE expense of a first-class passage, by steamer, from Liverpool to New York, is from eighteen to twenty pounds; and from thence to New Orleans, either by railroad or Mississippi steamboat, about ten or twelve more. The pleasantest travelling is by the river. By sailing vessel, direct to New Orleans, the fare, best cabin, is twenty pounds. If the sportsman wishes to try the cane-brakes of Arkansas, Louisiana, or Mississippi, he cannot do better than make New Orleans his head-quarters. If, however, he desires to go to the paradise of hunters, he will take the steamer to Galveston, Texas, which he will reach after a run of thirty hours, or so, across the Mexican Gulf. From Galveston, on the Island of Galveston, he can reach the mainland by boat or rail, and in the interior there are plenty of conveyances to all parts of Texas.

A good steady shooting pony will be the first requirement of the sportsman, and these can be obtained for about six pounds, or just now, perhaps, a trifle more. A good saddle, more suited to the country, and to pack game on, can be got for five pounds.

If the sportsman likes four-in-hand work, he had better take out his harness and whips—the harness adapted for horses

of from fourteen and a-half to fifteen and a-half hands. A Jersey-waggon, fit for two or four horses, can be picked up in the country.

Pointers had better be taken, as few good for anything can be found in the country.

A good stock of underclothing, as light as possible, and a pair or two of rusty-brown tweed shooting-jackets and trowsers, with some high riding-boots, will be found useful; but it must always be remembered that too much luggage is a nuisance.

On the prairies grouse, deer, and hares are found the whole State over.

In the forests, which border the rivers, deer, bears, panthers, cats, wild cattle, turkeys, &c., are abundant.

The edges of the forests, where they touch the prairies, are frequented by the quail.

In the bramble-patches and dwarf-cane, you will seldom look for woodcock in vain.

The swamps abound in snipes.

The rivers, lakes, ponds, and even puddles, hold ducks, teal, &c., all the winter months.

Cur dogs, for bear-hunting, are common; and so are some pretty good hounds for deer-driving.

A couple of rough staghounds might be carried out, if the sportsman is fond of coursing; in this case, he would generally course deer instead of hares.

The expenses of a trip for some six months, including travelling expenses both ways, and all necessary expenditure, ought not to exceed 250*l.* This, comparatively, is no money at all to men who hire a Scotch moor for 600*l.* per season.

I need not say that in variety, quantity, and quality of game, the Texan country exceeds Scotland, to say nothing of its

climate. The warm, sunny South would suit many a weak-chested sportsman, and very likely give him a new lease of life.

In conclusion, I can say that *my* gun kept *me*, for many long years, in meat, clothes, and money, whilst I enjoyed uninterrupted health.

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